

CZECH REPUBLIC

A STUDY ABROAD



By
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Dobry den, jak se mate? Confused? Well so was I during my first encounter with the Czech language. However, it was not long before I grew to love the language, the culture and the people of the Czech Republic. Upon my arrival at the airport I was somewhat disoriented by the foreign signs and speech. However, it was not long before I was tripping over my first words of polite greetings such as Dobre rano, dobrou noc and nashle danou. I went to the Czech Republic with my two college mates: Cathy Soyka and Narissa Martin. Cathy's parents are natives of the Czech Republic and were indeed the inspiration for our decision to go there. We stayed at her grandmother's house in the Moravian countryside for the first of our five week trip and it was here that I was first introduced to these greetings as well as the months of the year. I can now say and distinguish the difference between brzen as the month of march instead of substituting it for Bucharest, the capital of Romania, which was more linguistically approachable for me.

We soon moved from the countryside to our dorms in the city of Prague. They very conveniently located five minutes from our classes at Charles University. An average day consisted of 4 1/2 hours of intensive Czech study (grammar and conversation) in the morning followed by a break. The afternoons were reserved for cultural excursions to the many palaces, churches, museums (like those dedicated to the famous composer the Bedrich Smetana and Mozart as well as to the prolific writer Franz Kafka) and other noteworthy sites in and around Prague. There was even time for a recreational swim in the river that inspired Smetana's the Moldau- the Vltava (the latter is the Czech translation of the moldau).





Yet another interesting experience was a casual tour and tasting of the U fleku brewery in the city. The Czech Republic is well known for its beer production. What better way to immerse oneself in the culture of a place than by partaking in one of its favorite pastimes. I quickly found out that the Czech Republic, little known to me before my trip, was not only once the heart of Europe but also continues to serve presently as a historical and cultural reservoir of the past. One reason for this is that the Czech Republic was one of the very few European countries who was spared the total destruction of their infrastructure. Thus the beauty and mystery of the Czech Republic is preserved in its palaces and museums.

Though the sites were beautiful, they were dwarfed by the friendliness of the people themselves. The Czech people were very warm and they readily embraced us. From the humble, picturesque countryside to the bustling cityscape of Prague, the warmth and generosity of the people were consistent. They were very willing to share their culture and their lives with us. Whether it was the roasting of the thick sausages, familiarly known as klobasa, under the cover of the stars, in the quiet town of Jitkov, to the fastpaced talking of the merchants as we took our evening stroll across the Charles Bridge in Prague, the mood was always a friendly one.

The trip was so filled with events that there are many still to be mentioned such as the Krizikova Fontana (singing fountain) which gave a performance of Ma Vlast (my country). Composed by Bedrich Smetana this piece follows the river's course through the Czech Republic during its high and low tides. It was very entertaining and fell quite in line with many of the other spectacular sites that we were to see in Prague. Two of them being our trips to the gypsy town of Cesky Krumlov as well as to the Medieval town. This culturally filled schedule continued right up until the end of our stay. Indeed, at the end of trip, I felt as if I had experienced a lifetime in only five weeks, so immersed and impressed was I by what I had learnt of Czech culture and language. I hope to one day revisit the Czech Republic and the life and the people whom I had grown to love so dearly. But until then I am left with fond memories of a people and their culture.

