



Yes, you will say "ahhhh" when you see Prague, United's newest city. I recently spent 12 days in this spectacular capital and would return in a heartbeat. Prague was relatively untouched by the physical destruction that many European cities suffered during both World Wars, and the rich history of this "Paris of the east" capital is evident everywhere you walk – and walking is the best way to see Prague. No need to rent a car as Prague has a public transportation system that can get you anywhere in mere minutes – and that includes easily traveling from Prague's Václav Havel airport to the heart of city. Tip: Bring an extra passport size picture with you and before leaving the airport terminal stop at the white Metro – Tram- Bus booth across from doorway F.



Here you can obtain a Senior ID card (if you are at least 65) entitling you to **free** travel on all metro (subways), trams and buses in the greater Prague area! Start using this perk immediately by boarding bus 119, located right outside the terminal building, which will take you to the closest metro stop (Nádraží Voleslavín) where you can catch the B green line for a quick ride into town. Stay with me for the next few minutes and I will give you more tips on how to enjoy a wonderful vacation in beautiful Prague.

History: Prague is an old and important city and became one of Europe's largest and wealthiest cities as well as the capital of the Holy Roman Empire in 1355. Over the centuries Bohemia, as the country was once known, has seen its share of battles and conquerors. When the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed in 1918, Czechoslovakia was born as an independent nation with Prague as the capital. From 1939-1945 the Nazis occupied the country, followed in 1948 by the Communists. Severe repression and decline continued until November 1989 when the "Velvet Revolution" ended communist rule and eventually the country split into 2 independent nations 1993: Czech Republic, with Prague as the capital, and Slovak Republic, with Bratislava as its capital. Admitted into the European Union in 2004, but not yet fully integrated, the Czech Republic's currency is still the Czech Koruna (CZK), not the Euro. Prague is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and displays a magnificent mixture of Gothic, Romanesque and baroque architecture with a healthy dose of Renaissance, cubist and neo-classical thrown in for good measure. Music and the arts are essential to Prague's identity, boasting native sons, Dvorak, Smetana, Kafka, as well as Good King Wenceslas!

What to do: On the top of most first-time visitor's list is the Charles Bridge, built in 1357 to connect Prague Castle on the hill above the Vltava river, with the "new" town emerging on the west side of the river. Over the millennia 30 large statues of saints and important historical figures have been erected along both sides of the span with 2 impressive portal gates at either end, providing protection. The 1692 ft. pedestrian only, multi-arched bridge is alive with locals and visitors any time of the day, but the view of the bridge when it is lit at night is truly not to be missed. Tip: The best spot for a photograph is from the weeping willow tree next to the statue of Smetana on the lower terrace below the Smetana Museum at the northwest end of the bridge. There is a small restaurant called Klub Lávka adjoining this area. At night, it is magical.

St. Vitus Cathedral and Prague Castle are the natural next choice to visit. Take a #22 tram in front of the shopping center known as OC Quadrio which sits atop the Národní třída metro stop. (You may also want to peek out the back entrance of the mall to see the rotating sculpture of Kafka's head titled "Metamorphosis"). Watch as all the pieces eventually slide into place and briefly stop, creating a perfect 30ft tall shiny silver 3-D replica of Franz Kafka! Tram 22 crosses the river and makes the steep ascent to the castle in less than 10 minutes. There is no fee for wandering the castle grounds, but you will need to purchase tickets to enter inside any of the buildings, including St. Vitus Cathedral, which is a must-do. Tip: Avoid an unnecessary delay by heading directly through the gate past the uniformed castle guards, into the first courtyard, ignoring the line-up of people at a "ticket" window on your right. Instead, pass by this line, turn left proceeding into another courtyard and look for a glass door on your right with a sign reading, "Audio Guides and Tickets".

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Your back will be to the Cathedral when you see this glass door. Enter through the glass door, turn left at top of stairs and purchase your ticket and/or audio guide. Be sure to show them your new senior ID and passport to enjoy a substantial discount. And don't miss the wonderful food booths located in the square behind the Cathedral. No need to find a restaurant when you can enjoy freshly made Czech specialties right from the grill. The potatoes and vegetables are outstanding alongside the many varieties of sausages and, of course, cold Czech beer!

Later, on your way down from the castle along the easily walkable sloping road beyond the vineyards, be sure to stop at the bottom near the Malá Strana metro stop to take in the beautiful Wallenstein Gardens. Now this is not just another European manicured garden with peacocks...these gardens and surrounding buildings were the castle of the prominent Wallenstein family from the year 630. But the real kicker is the so-called Dripping Wall in the Grotto. See how many faces and animals you can find within this odd but imaginative 25 ft. tall wall!



Another must-do is viewing the Astronomical Clock located in Old Town Square. Join the crowd as the clock comes to life every hour, on the hour, from 9AM-11PM. Watch the figures move through the open windows and the skeleton as he turns the hourglass upside down to begin the next hours' countdown. Wander around this square and admire the architecture of each building, tower and church. In fact, there's a saying in Prague: "Don't look down, look up!" You will be rewarded with countless delights. And speaking of delights, try a Trdelník, either here at the square, at the castle grounds or elsewhere around the city. Look for booths baking a spiral of sugar-walnut dough which is then shaped into a cone, filled with ice-cream and often decorated with a topping. You will see people everywhere walking around enjoy a Trdelník. No one leaves Prague without trying one.

Being compared to Paris, Prague has its own Eiffel Tower, easily seen from the Charles Bridge. You can take the funicular up through the beautiful hillside and park for a peak, and use your senior ID card for a free ride. You'll find the entrance just a few steps away from the #22 tram stop on Újezd Street. Also stop at the outdoor sculpture on the steps in the same area, entitled "Memorial to the Victims of Communism". Created in 2002 by artist Olbram Zoubek, the bronze artwork portrays upright men with their bodies breaking apart under the pressures of communism. For a reward after all your walking, stop for the best ice-cream/gelato in the city at Angelato, located right across Újezd from the tram stop. The lines may be long, but the treat is worth it!

A walking tour of the Jewish Quarter brings the somber side of the city's history into focus. Learn how Jewish citizens survived and indeed flourished here long before Hitler and the Nazis decimated the population. Be on the lookout for 4"x4" bronze plaques imbedded in the sidewalks all over Prague inscribed with the name, address, birth and death dates of Jewish citizens murdered by the Nazi regime. And also visit St. Cyril and Methodius Cathedral to see where Operation Anthropoid, the incredibly devised plan by the Czech government-in-exile and British Special Operations to assassinate one of the most powerful men in Hitler's circle, SS Gen. Reinhard Heydrich in 1942 took place. The reprisals from this act proved deadly for many individuals as well as whole villages near the city.

There is much more to enjoy, like the famous Infant of Prague, the Fred and Ginger dancing building, George Lucas' inspiration for Darth Vader, the Lennon Wall, Kampa Park along the Vltava River and the ancient park and city walls of Vyšehrad. Research these before you go and then explore when you get there!

Where to eat: Czech food is hearty, filling, not spicy but heavy on both potato and bread dumplings. But the Czechs also enjoy worldwide cuisine and you can easily find everything from sushi to pizza. A good choice for everyday meals is at any branch of the Kolkovna restaurant chain. They brew their own beer and it's good. Speaking of beer, Czech beer is famous, especially Pilsner Urquell. You will find an endless supply of small, friendly bistros down every street and small alley. If you are fond of the elegance of a Parisian style pastries and coffee, do not bypass a visit to "Louvre" at Národní 22. Another favorite is Café Savoy at Vitezna 124, just one block north of the Legii Bridge. Tip: Be sure to pay a visit to the WC downstairs at Café Savoy – you'll get a view of the chandelier bedecked baking kitchen along the way.

Where to stay: Prague is divided into numbered districts. Consider choosing accommodations in Prague 1, 4 or 8 as they are convenient to most of the attractions I've described above. Hotels and Airbnb accommodations are plentiful and it's much more fun to stay in a locally owned property than a dime-a-dozen chain hotel. Our Airbnb was inside a baroque apartment building located less than 1 block from Florenc metro station. The unit had its own kitchen, bath, bedroom, TV and free Wi-Fi, along with a washing machine that was shared with the unit next door. All the comforts of home at a great price. We also stayed at the Metropol Hotel, a basic but efficient small hotel next to the tiny Lego Museum and across the street from Národní třída metro station. This hotel has a rooftop terrace with a great view. The breakfast is ample and the location is ideal.

Navigating the metro: There are 3 metro lines which are color coded and denoted by the letters A, B and C. The stations are clean, with brick and artwork esthetics. Escalators are fast and can be steep, so use caution when approaching the steps. It is easy to determine where you are, and on which side of the platform your train will depart by simply looking at the horizontal direction board suspended between the track portals.



Your current location will always be in white and the names of all the up line and down line stations will be listed with an arrow pointing to the correct side of the platform where you should stand. Additionally, the color associated with your train will always be the background color of the sign and the closest transfer station to each of the other 2 lines will be listed in their respective color and letter. After your first ride, you'll be a pro.

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Tip: One last note on transportation concerns a fast, efficient and cost-effective way to take side-trips outside of Prague. FlixBus covers frequent, clean and safe bus transportation to all areas of the Czech Republic as well as to Vienna, Munich, Bratislava, Warsaw, Krakow, Berlin, Frankfurt, etc. We made a day trip to the fairy-tale town of Český Krumlov, a 2½ hr. ride each way, for less than the price of a latte, because of the senior ID card. That senior discount applies to all journeys inside the country only, not trans-border. But even those trips are extremely reasonable. Reserve online at www.flixbus.com and catch the coach at Florenc metro/bus station. This service is a good way to reach an alternative UA city if flights are full out of Prague.

Well, this is a lot of information, but tear out this page and keep for future reference or pass it along to friends or family. You can tell I was smitten with Prague, and I'm sure you will be too!