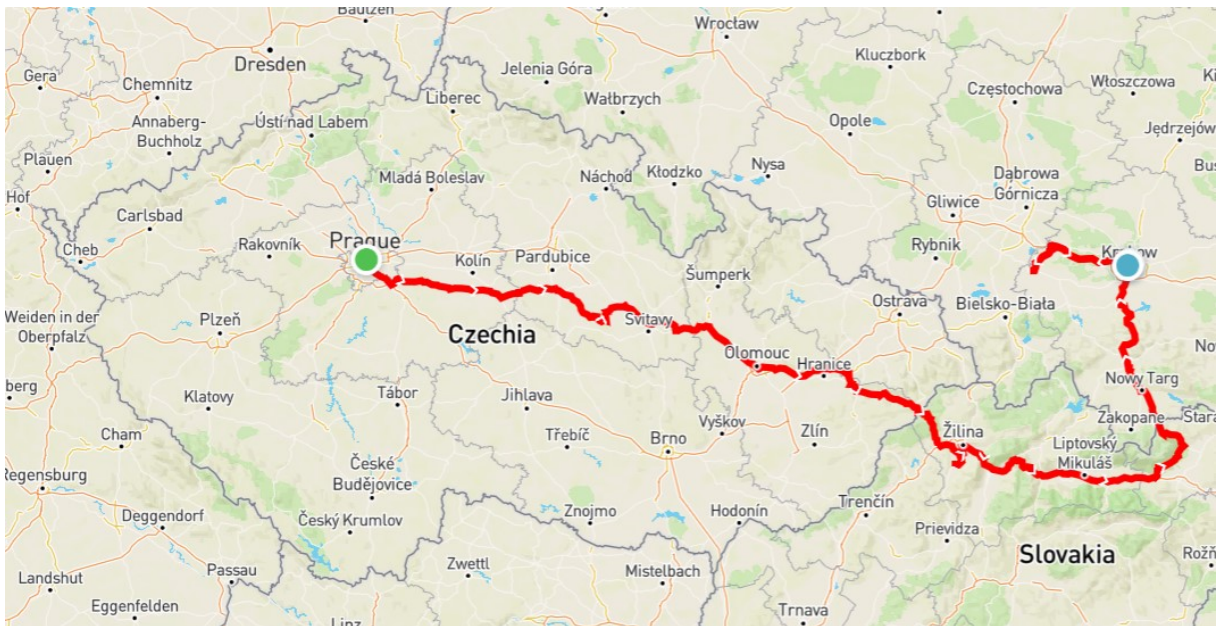


Prague to Krakow, True Gems Among Cities

Highlights

- Prague, ancient splendor and beauty beyond compare
- Eleven Czech, Slovak, and Polish UNESCO world heritage sites
- Lavish architecture of the silver city of Kutna Hora
- Gentle landscaping of the Pruhonice Park
- Majestic Renaissance chateau in Litomyšl
- Baroque fountains and Holy Trinity Column in Olomouc
- Architectural diversity of the Orava castle
- Cultural treasures of the Spis Region
- Scenic rafting on the Dunajec River
- Museum of the holocaust in Auschwitz-Birkenau
- Pulsating city of Krakow

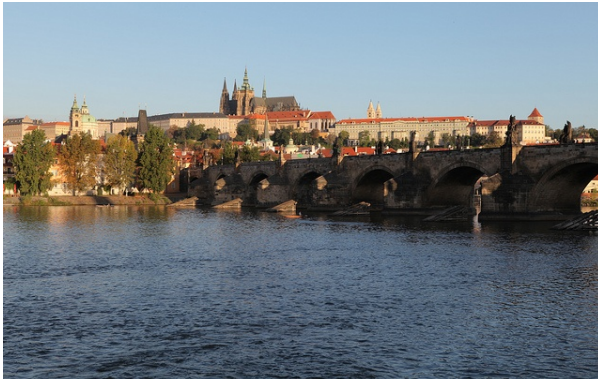


DAY 1 Arrival in Prague, orientation briefing

Transfer from Prague Airport to our hotel in the city center on an individual basis. In the evening we meet our guide and enjoy dinner and an orientation briefing in a nearby restaurant.

Overnight: Prague

DAY 2 Prague, city of a hundred spires



Prague Castle



Charles Bridge in Prague

If European cities were a necklace, Prague would be a diamond among the pearls. We start the day with a guided tour of Prague's most prominent sights, including Prague Castle, the symbol of Czech statehood and the largest castle in the world, the monumental St. Vitus Cathedral, its lofty interior lit by the glow of stained glass windows, the complex stone vaulting system of the Vladislav Hall, picturesque little houses in the Golden Lane and the magnificent aristocratic palaces and charming gardens of the Lesser Quarter. After lunch we enjoy the playful Baroque architecture of St. Nicholas Cathedral, elaborate statues of saints on the legendary Charles Bridge, the winding cobbled streets of the Old Town, lined with rows of graceful medieval houses, and the sophisticated Astronomical Clock with its hourly show of the figures of the Apostles and other moving sculptures. We learn the history of the Jewish community in the Jewish Quarter, dominated by the grand synagogue and the famous Old Jewish Cemetery, and briefly enjoy some free time before dinner in a tasteful restaurant.

Overnight: Prague

DAY 3 Lavish landscaping of Pruhonice park (10 km)



Pruhonice Chateau



Pruhonice Park

In the morning we take a short drive to the nearby Pruhonice Park, a UNESCO site and one of the most significant landscape elements in Europe. The park was established by Count Silva-Tarouca in 1885, in the period when the landscaping style

peaked and parks in Europe were enriched by a variety of exotic plants. It is here that lovers of nature among us will indeed find themselves in a dendrological and botanical paradise. Strolling in the park, we appreciate plants and trees of great diversity, including magnolias, rhododendrons, azaleas, big-leaf linden trees branching all the way to the ground, Alaska cedars, Japanese orixas, large tulip trees, Serbian spruces, copper beeches, bald cypresses, snake branch spruce and many others. Free arrangement is very typical for the park: woody plants, trees, and shrubs pleasantly alternate with meadows, lakes, streams, and their meanders. The composition of the park is based on brilliantly selected vistas of monuments, either Chateau, gloriette, or groups of plants. We transfer to our hotel in Kutna Hora.

Overnight: Kutna Hora

DAY 3 Silver city of Kutna Hora



St. Barbara's Church in Kutna Hora



Sedlec Ossuary

We start today's hike at what remains of the Sion Castle, the last stronghold of the Protestant reformers who opposed the Catholic majority in the 15th century. A scenic walk takes us through a romantic wooded valley alongside the Vrchlice Creek, occasionally crossing it on small wooden bridges. After a picnic lunch we arrive at Kutna Hora, a stunning and inspiring medieval city. Thanks to its great deposits of silver ore the city competed with Prague economically, culturally and politically between the 13th and 16th centuries. We take a sightseeing tour, visiting the monumental St. Barbara's Church, built in the 14th century to rival the famous St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague. We walk alongside a row of Baroque statues in front of the colossal Jesuit College, enjoy the interior of St. Jacob's church and learn about the history of minting at the Italian Court. The tour also includes a visit to the Cistercian monastic church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and a spooky Ossuary in Sedlec, with its unique artistic decorations made of bones and skeletons. There is the option of a drive to the nearby Kacina Chateau, the most significant Imperial-style monument in the Czech Republic, or to spend the rest of the day in the city.

Overnight: Kutna Hora

DAY 4 Rocks and gorges of Toulovec's Stables and a stately chateau in Litomysl



Toulovec's Stables Natural Area



Renaissance Chateau in Litomysl

Leaving Kutna Hora, we take a short transfer to the protected natural area of Toulovec's Stables. According to one legend, Lawrence Toulovec, a robber knight, used the area as a hiding place for himself and his entourage in the 14th century, and is alleged to have buried his plundered treasure here. In fact the area is a showcase of sandstone formations, gorges and canyons, created by the world's most talented artist, Mother Nature, over centuries of weathering and erosion. We hike along a labyrinth of pathways among sandstone rocks in a verdant pine forest, next to the babbling Voletinsky Brook and under majestic Cretaceous limestone cliffs. Some of the rocks have been named according to objects they resemble, among the most attractive ones are the Town Stables, Columbus's Egg, the Pulpit, Dudych's Cave, the Lord's Table, and others. Later in the afternoon we take a guided tour of the Renaissance chateau in Litomysl, a prominent UNESCO site, and enjoy its charming sgraffito decoration, stately halls, stylish furniture and chinaware, as well as its unique Baroque theatre.

Overnight: Olomouc

DAY 5 Olomouc, world heritage sites



Piarist Gardens in Litomysl



Arion Fountain in Olomouc

We start the morning with a guided tour of Olomouc, a real gem among cities, whose historical significance compares only to that of Prague. Thanks to its long religious tradition it features not only a number of Gothic and Baroque churches, monasteries and palaces, but also a unique set of Baroque fountains portraying gods and heroes from ancient Roman mythology. However, the most prominent landmark is the

monumental Holy Trinity Column, towering above the main square, and thanks to which Olomouc ranks high on the UNESCO cultural heritage list. After lunch, we enjoy the afternoon at our leisure before coming together again for a delightful dinner.

Overnight: Olomouc

DAY 6 Picturesque wooden houses in Roznov Open-Air Museum



Open-Air Museum in Roznov



The Beskyds Mountains

Our morning transfer takes us to Roznov, a former climatic resort and, at the same time, a gateway to the Moravian-Silesian Beskids. First we visit the Wallachian Open-Air Museum, we inspect the interior of picturesque wooden houses and learn about the lifestyles of the common people living in past centuries. We then set out for an easy panoramic hike on a mountain ridge and immerse ourselves in the captivating scenery of the Beskids. We reach the summit of the legendary mountain of Radhost, where Pagans used to worship and sacrifice to Radegast, the god of the sun, the harvest, fertility and hospitality. However, Radegast was later replaced by Cyril and Methodius, influential Byzantine missionaries, to whom a wooden chapel was erected at the top in 1898. We could hardly wish for a more honorable farewell to the Czech Republic as we are leaving now to gain new experiences, this time represented by the grandiose nature of the Slovakian landscape. We transfer to Rajecke Teplice, renowned Slovakian spa.

Overnight: Rajecke Teplice

DAY 7 Dreamy landscape of the Strazov Mountains



Folk architecture in Cicmany

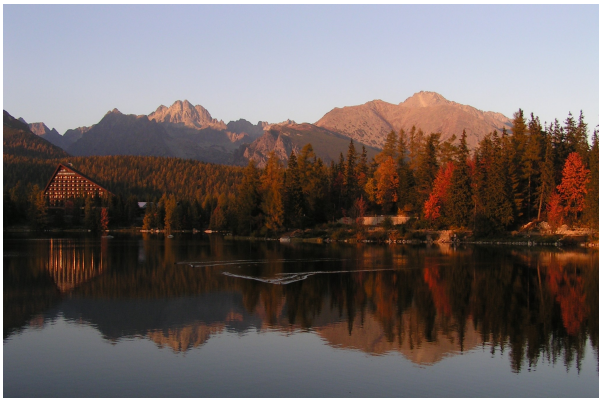


The Strazov Mountains

We start the day with a scenic hike in the Strazov Mountains, through alternating patches of spruce woods and flowery meadows, enjoying panoramic vistas of the surrounding undulating landscape. After a picnic lunch at a nice spot in the massive Sulov Rocks, we continue on our way through a gap to yet another valley, offering different views of the nearby Lesser Fatra Mountains. A short transfer will take us to the picturesque village of Cicmany, famous for its unique folk architecture. The village was established by immigrants from the Balkans as early as the 13th century, and remained a center of sheep farming until the end of the 19th century, when time stopped here. Today, we can enjoy the ornamental decoration of gingerbread-like cottages, being proof of the masterly skills and refined aesthetic sense of the local people. On the way back, we pay a visit to Rajecka Lesna to explore an elaborate moving wood-carved Nativity Scene, depicting also the typical architecture and life of the Slovak peoples. We spend the rest of the day at leisure or optionally in an antiquity-style thermal spa, where treatment with curative mineral water is combined with the aesthetic experience.

Overnight: Rajecke Teplice

DAY 8 Mountain lakes of the High Tatras



Strbske Lake in High Tatras



Popradske Lake in High Tatras

We spend today in the High Tatras, the highest part of the Carpathian Range and the most beautiful part of Slovakia. It is the only mountain range of an alpine character in Central Europe, with peaks reaching 8,711 ft. We take pleasure in the uplifting views of the imposing aiguilles and craggy slopes surrounding the Strbske Lake, from where we set out for a scenic hike to the Popradske Lake. In spite of being in alpine mountains, the hike is rated easy to moderate, with an elevation gain of only 500 ft, while still offering wonderful views of the beautiful mountain scenery. After lunch we walk around the romantic Popradske Lake and experience the peaceful atmosphere of the symbolic cemetery, dedicated to climbers and to people who have significantly contributed to alpine tourism. An easy downhill walk on a paved track takes us to our minibus which will drive us to the nearby town of Novy Smokovec. In the evening, we enjoy a delicious dinner in a stylish restaurant.

Overnight: Novy Smokovec

DAY 9 Lofty majesty of the High Tatras



Slavkovsky and Prostredny Peaks

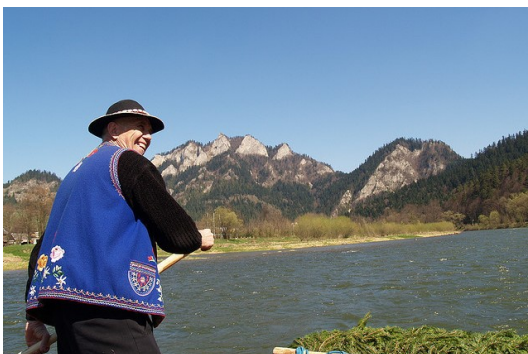


Lomnicke Saddle

It's time to get higher up and enjoy the most impressive, breathtaking views of the grandiose mountains from a mountaineer's perspective. No need to worry, we are taking a gondola lift. The gondola will take us to Lomnicke Saddle at an altitude of 7,200 feet. On the mountain ridge, we take a safe short walk along a broad path, enjoying the panoramic views of the Cold Valley carved out deep below, and the majestic Lomnický and Slavkovský peaks towering around us. The lift will take us back to the Rocky-Mountain Lake (5,750 ft.), from where we take a gradual downhill hike on a rocky path, offering more spectacular views of the Low Tatras looming in the distance. After lunch at Bilikova Cottage, we continue our hike through shady spruce woods, around the humming Great Waterfall to the Hrebienok Plateau (4,150 ft.), from where we either take the funicular or continue walking alongside the waterfalls of the Cold Brook. We top off the day with a folklore evening in a stylish log house restaurant, indulging in a traditional Slovak dinner and listening to live folk music.

Overnight: Nový Smokovec

DAY 10 Scenic rafting on the Dunajec River



Rafting the Dunajec River



Pieniny National Park

Heading north to the Polish border, we enjoy the panoramic scenery of the High Tatras for the last time, to seek more experiences in the Pieniny National Park. This popular holiday destination, which is also renowned for its natural beauties, used to be a favorite of the former pope, John Paul II. Starting at a former Carthusian monastery, we set out for a scenic raft trip on the Dunajec River, snaking through a deep gorge flanked by craggy, limestone rocks. In the past the river was used to

transport timber all the way to the Baltic Sea by the Gorals, local indigenous people who also gave the rocks their romantic names according to their appearance. Therefore, we enjoy the romantic views of the Gateway to Pieniny, Three Crowns, Seven Monks, Falcon-Gentle, Mother-in-Law's Mouth, Mother of Pieniny, and many others. The wooden raft is poled along by experienced raftsmen, dressed in traditional costumes, who take us back in time with captivating stories from the past. After a picnic lunch we bid farewell to Slovakia and take a transfer to the royal city of Krakow (UNESCO site).

Overnight: Krakow

DAY 11 **Museum of the Holocaust in Auschwitz-Birkenau**



Museum in Auschwitz



The infamous Death Gate in Birkenau

We may split our group in two today, with one enjoying leisure time in Krakow and the other visiting the Museum of the Holocaust in Auschwitz (UNESCO site). Those of us who dare, take a morning transfer to Auschwitz, the nazis' biggest concentration camp created during the harsh times of war. We take a guided tour of the authentic wood and brick buildings, which at one point housed as many as a hundred thousand inmates, and we learn about the Jews who were deported here from all parts of Europe. We can see collections of authentic photographs, personal possessions and works of art made secretly by the inmates, and explore the pitifully small mass cells, solitary confinements, and the infamous gate of death, arousing a deep compassion for all those innocent men, women, and children. The purpose of our visit here is to experience the omnipresent imperative that the horrors of the Holocaust and the disastrous consequences of the suppression of freedom, democracy, and human rights should never be forgotten. Later in the afternoon we are driven back to Krakow to rejoin the rest of the group for dinner.

Overnight: Krakow

DAY 12

Pulsating Royal city of Krakow



Main Market Square in Krakow



Wawel Castle in Krakow

We enjoy a guided tour of the medieval city of Krakow, historically the most important city in Poland and, at the same time, a prominent UNESCO World Heritage Site. As the city has largely been left intact since the Tartar raids of the 13th century, walking through the Old Town streets is like drifting back through a historical novel. We start the tour in the Main Market Square, one of the largest medieval squares in Europe, dominated by the famous 16th century Cloth Hall, its vibrant atmosphere completed by lively market stalls and pavement cafés. We walk along the medieval city walls and take a pleasant stroll through the Kazimierz District, the former centre of Jewish culture, which boasts a number of synagogues, lively art galleries and kosher restaurants. Learn the history of the Wawel Castle, Krakow's most celebrated sight and the seat of Polish kings until the early 17th century. The tour ends at the Jagiellonian University, the oldest university in Poland, established in 1364. After lunch we enjoy a free afternoon or take a tour of the nearby Wieliczka Salt Mines, featuring underground chambers, lakes, chapels adorned with statues of saints and even a large cavity turned into a cathedral. In the evening we officially end the tour and indulge in a festive farewell dinner.

Overnight: Krakow