

20. PRAGUE

Základní otázky

1. What kind of city is Prague?
2. Where does it lie?
3. What did Charles IV do for it?
4. What is its status now?
5. Which are the most famous monuments?
6. Which is the oldest part of the city?
7. Where is the commercial centre of Prague?
8. Which is the biggest museum and where is it?
9. Which is the oldest castle?

Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic. It is the most important political, economic and cultural centre of our country and a residence of our President and the Czech Government.

It lies in "the heart of Europe", on both banks of the river Vltava in the centre of Bohemia. It covers an area of about 500 square kilometres and it has 1.5 million inhabitants.

A legend connects the foundation of Prague with princess Libuše. In the 14th century the most famous Czech king Charles IV established an Archbishop and founded the Charles University. During his reign the town flourished and grew and became the centre of the country. King Charles founded the New Town and promoted construction of the Charles Bridge and St. Vitus Cathedral. In the 18th century Prague was the centre of Czech cultural life when Czech scholars and writers began the process of national revival. In 1918 Prague became the capital of the independent Czechoslovakia. When, in 1993 the former federal Czechoslovakia split into two independent states, Prague became the capital of the Czech Republic.

Prague is full of outstanding historical monuments. That's why they sometimes call her "a hundred-tower mother of towns". Number one is Prague Castle. It was a residence of Czech kings and is now a seat of the president. We can find there many gothic, renaissance and baroque houses and palaces with gardens. The most impressive building is the Gothic St. Vitus Cathedral. It was completed in 1929, nearly six hundred years after its founding by Charles IV. The famous part of the Castle is Golden Lane, where many craftsmen lived.

Mala Strana
The Lesser Town is one of the most beautiful parts of Prague. It is the oldest part of the town. When we go downhill from the Prague Castle to the Charles Bridge, we can go through Neruda Street, where one of the biggest Czech writers – Jan Neruda – was born. Near this street is St. Nicholas church, built in baroque style.

Charles Bridge, the oldest bridge in Prague, connects the Lesser Town with the Old Town – the historical centre of Prague. This bridge was built by Charles IV, when the original Judith's bridge was torn down by a flood. It is decorated with 30 statues in baroque style. On the bridge there are many artists and musicians, stalls with pictures of Prague and with jewellery for tourists.

The Old Town Square is the centre of historical Prague. It is well known for the astronomical clock with twelve apostles. There are also many hotels and restaurants and gift shops.

Jewish Town is a part of historical Prague. In the past the Jews were not allowed to live in any other place but the ghetto. Now all that remains are several synagogues. The best known are the Old-New Synagogue and Pinkas Synagogue. On the walls of this Synagogue are written the names of victims from the Nazi terror. Nearby there is an old Jewish cemetery and a Jewish museum.

Wenceslas square is a commercial centre of Prague. It is known for its statue of St. Wenceslas on a horse in the upper part of the square. There are many shops, small cafeterias, fast foods, hotels and restaurants. We can find small shops in arcades such as Jalta, Blaník or Lucerna. On the top of the square there is the National Museum. It is the biggest and the oldest Czech museum.

From Wenceslas Square we can go to the Republic Square along the Na Příkopě Street which is known for luxurious shops. We will also pass by the Powder Gate, which originally was one of the entrances to the Old Town.

Another monument that shouldn't be forgotten is the Vyšehrad Castle. It is the oldest castle in Prague and was another seat of the kings. Near the Vyšehrad Castle is the very famous Slavín Cemetery where Czech artists, writers and important Prague citizens are buried.

Although the centre of Prague is not big, it is full of interesting places and always full of tourists. They can find here many monuments of various styles, nice pubs and restaurants and many shops.