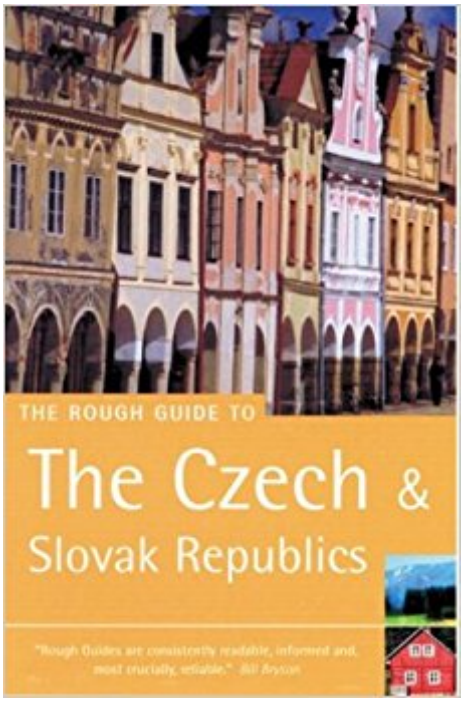
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The Rough Guide To Czech & Slovak Republics



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Synopsis

This guide to the Czech and Slovak Republics features a full-colour section introducing the Czech and Slovak Republics' highlights. It also contains entertaining accounts of all the sights, from the handsome architecture of Prague to the spa towns of West Bohemia and the alpine splendour of the High Tatra mountains. There are listings of the best places to stay, eat and drink, in every region and for every budget. The author also provides informed background on Czech and Slovak history and contemporary life.

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Customer Reviews

Rob Humphreys has travelled extensively in central and eastern Europe, writing guides to Prague, Czech & Slovak Republics, St Petersburg and London.

WHERE TO GO Before the fall of Communism, a staggering ninety percent of foreign tourists visiting Czechoslovakia never strayed from the environs of the Czech capital, Prague. While that no longer holds true, Prague is still the main focus of most people’s trips to the Czech Republic, certainly English-speaking tourists. Of course, much of the attention heaped on Prague is perfectly justified. It is one of the most remarkable cities in Europe, having emerged virtually unscathed from two world wars. Baroque palaces and churches shout out from the cobbles, Gothic pinnacles spike the skyline, and Art Nouveau and functionalist edifices line the boulevards. The rest of the Czech Republic divides neatly into two: Bohemia to the west and Moravia to the east. Prague is the perfect

launching pad from which to explore the rolling hills and forests of Bohemia, at their most unspoilt in South Bohemia, whose capital is CeskÃƒÂ© Budejovice, a grid-plan medieval city and home to the original Budweiser beer. The real gem of the region is Cesky Krumlov, arguably the most stunning medieval town in the country, beautifully preserved in a narrow U-bend of the River Vltava. To the west, Plzen produces the most famous of all Czech beers, Pilsener Urquell, the original golden nectar from which all other lagers derive. Meanwhile, along the German border, a triangle of relaxing spa towns – Karlovy Vary, MariÃƒÂ¡nskÃƒÂ© LÃƒÂ¡zne and Frantiskovy LÃƒÂ¡zne – retain an air of their halcyon days in the last years of the Habsburg Empire. Pine-covered mountains form Bohemia’s natural borders, and the weird sandstone "rock cities" of the CeskÃƒÂ© Svycarsko and Cesky raj and Krkonose, in the north and east of the region, make for some of the most memorable landscapes. Moravia, the eastern province of the Czech Republic, is every bit as beautiful as Bohemia, though the crowds here thin out significantly. The largest city, Brno, has its own peculiar pleasures – not least its interwar functionalist architecture – and gives access to the popular Moravian karst region, or Moravsky kras, plus a host of other nearby castles and chateaux. The southern borders of Moravia comprise the country’s main wine region, while in the uplands that form the border with Bohemia are two of the most perfectly preserved medieval towns in the entire country, Telc and Slavonice. To the north, Olomouc is perhaps Moravia’s most charming city, more immediately appealing than Brno, and just a short step away from the region’s highest mountains, the JesenÃƒÂ-ky in Moravian Silesia, and the Beskydy, renowned for their folk architecture. Although the Slovak capital, Bratislava, can’t compare with Prague, it does have its virtues, not least its compact old town and its position on one of Europe’s great rivers, the Danube. The flat plain of the Danube basin is of little visual interest, but there are two historic towns that make worthwhile day-trips from the capital: Trnava, Slovakia’s most important ecclesiastical town, and Nitra, the spiritual centre of Slovak Catholicism. In the central mountain regions, well-preserved medieval mining towns like BanskÃƒÂ¡ Stiavnica and Kremnica still smack of their German origins. Other towns, like those in the VÃƒÂ¡h valley, are mainly of interest as bases for exploring the chief attractions of the region, the mountains of the MalÃƒÂ¡ Fatra, Low Tatras, and – tallest and most spectacular of the lot – the High Tatras. These jagged granite peaks are Slovakia’s most popular tourist destination, and justifiably so. Within easy reach, however, is the Spis region, the country’s architectural high point. The area is dotted with intriguing medieval towns, like Levoca, originally built by German settlers, now preserved almost untouched since the sixteenth century. And just a step away is the Slovensky raj, a thickly wooded region of verdant ravines and rocky outcrops. Further east still is

Presov the cultural centre of the Rusyn minority who inhabit the villages to the north and east. Here, you’ll find an extraordinary wealth of wooden churches. Finally, Kosice, Slovakia’s second largest city, boasts Europe’s easternmost Gothic cathedral and has a strongly Hungarian ambience. It’s also a good launch pad for exploring the Slovak karst region or Slovensky kras, and the beech forests of the Vihorlat region by the Ukrainian border. WHEN TO GO In general, the climate is continental, with short, fairly hot summers and chilly winters. Spring can be a good time to visit, as the days tend to warm quickly, with consistently pleasant, mild weather for most of May. This is also the blossom season, when the fruit trees that line so many Czech and Slovak roads are in full flower. Autumn is also recommended, with clear and settled weather often lasting for days on end in September and October. With both countries heavily forested, this is also a great time to appreciate the changing colours of the foliage. Winter can be a good time to come to Prague: the city looks beautiful under snow and there are fewer tourists to compete with. Other parts of the country have little to offer during winter (aside from skiing), and most sights stay firmly closed between November and March. Summer is, of course, still the season that sees the largest number of tourists descend on the two countries. Certainly, temperatures are at their highest, with the occasional heat wave pushing readings above 30Ã Â C. While that can be advantageous if you fancy swimming in a lake or river, it’s not fun in Prague, which is at its most crowded in July and August.

This book is chock full of details, with history and facts impressively presented for sights throughout the Czech Republic and Slovakia, places small and large. The dense pages are hard to navigate as they are formatted, making it difficult to find information quickly. Also, the author seems to have traveled by car and the book lacks practical information on public transportation, such as how long it takes to travel from one place to another and how much bus or train tickets cost. This book will provide you with great background information once you are already there, but for practical trip planning, I found I needed to refer to the Lonely Planet.

I purchased this book before a three-day trip to Liberec. Literally nothing that was written about the city was on target. Their opinion that the place was unattractive was, IMHO wrong. The recommended restaurants didn’t exist; were incorrectly located on the map; or were absolutely terrible! The opening/closing times for the Bohemian glass museum in a nearby town were inaccurate.Too bad I can’t return it.I’m planning on going back to the CZ. I’ll take Lonely Planet instead.

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