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Another Final Night in Prague

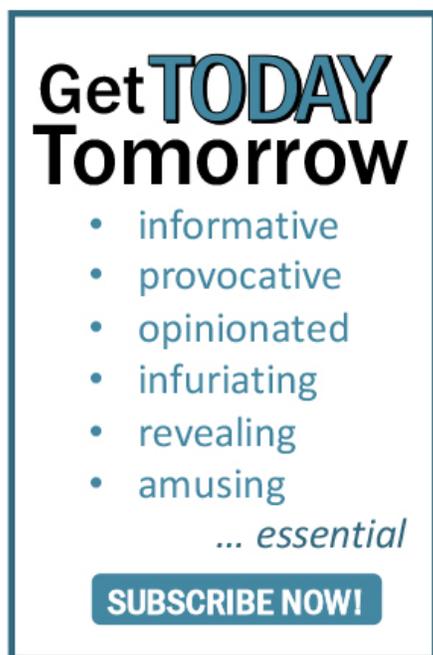
Steve Gillick

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05 JUL 2012: When we left Prague on Wednesday morning, it was with a bit of regret that we had not planned a longer stay. But our two week trip was based on exploring new destinations, being as active as possible, maximizing our exposure to history, culture and cuisine, and capturing the

mood, the spirit and the 'sense' of each place visited.



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Fortune dictated that we chose to stay at the Mamaison Riverside Hotel, situated across the Vlatva River from the Frank Gehry designed 'dancing' (or Fred and Ginger - as some locals call it) building, which is about a fifteen to twenty minute walk to the iconic Charles Bridge.

The Bridge is where everyone hangs out to take photos of the other bridges and the historic buildings, buy paintings and crafts and caricatures, listen to the amazing array of musicians and donate some coins to thank them for their concerts, or rub plaques and statues of saints and other religious figures in order to, according to myth (or custom), guarantee a return visit to Prague.

These musicians produce every type of music from classical glass (setting out wine glasses with various levels of water to produce xylophone-type

sounds) to bluegrass, to Mozart (some of the historic squares in the Charles Bridge area were used as sets during the shooting of the movie, Amadeus), to old-fashioned calliope music complete with a children's stuffed monkey. Rock was also represented (a solo tribute to Guns and Roses) and there was lots more.

The Bridge, built in or about the year 1400, links the Male Strana (or Little Quarter), which includes Prague Castle, with Old Town, the historic core of Prague that includes the Town Hall, the astronomical clock and tower and the Royal Way, which when we were there, led to the public square where a huge screen was set up to show the nightly Eurocup football matches.

Somewhere in the range of 15,000 fans were present on June 21st to see the beloved Czech team fall to Portugal. But the excitement of the match and the spirit of the crowd, duly fortified not only by copious amounts of Pilsner Urquell, Kozel, and Gambrinus beers (and, no doubt, some non-alcoholic drinks too), as well as the local patio and courtyard dining culture, helped to ensure that everyone left the game in a good mood.

The great advantage to our hotel was that it allowed us to discover more of Prague than we normally might have. The architecture of the buildings, best described as 'eclectic' combines Art Nouveau, Baroque and Rococo and when the sun is setting, it shows off in brilliant light the statues and designs of the buildings that distinguish Prague's uniqueness.

In walking on the west side of the river we happened upon the river locks in daily use by the tour boats, along with one of the city's more

prominent Jazz Clubs, and also, Kampa Island. The most major attraction of the island is the Museum Kampa, a modern art treasure trove that offers a free glimpse in their courtyard and grounds of what can be seen inside.

There is the formal 'mascot' of the museum, a huge chair set out on a dock in the river, and then behind the museum are the informal mascots, which, by the shiny evidence of people rubbing and patting, is much more fun and photographed. I am referring to David Cerny's huge micro-chip-faced naked babies. In fact, the babies were so popular that when the new television tower was completed (it can be seen off in the distance behind old town), Cerny contributed a set of babies climbing part of the tower.

And just beyond Kampa Island, is the John Lennon wall which was once visited by Yoko Ono who added her spray painted contribution. The wall is a growing art gallery of graffiti expressionism and changes on a daily basis as visitors from around the world add their thoughts on Lennon's constant themes of 'peace', 'love' and 'non-violence'.

For those who aren't quite ready yet to climb the stairs and join the crowds on the Charles Bridge (it's amazing that at 9:45 am the Bridge can be relatively empty but by 10:00 am it is packed), you can continue under the bridge to visit craft shops including some of the best Bohemian glass, puppet shops (marionettes of varying quality can be purchased everywhere in the tourist parts of the city), The Shakespeare Bookstore (which has a fairly good selection of Czech authors translated to English) and for those who are feeling truly transformed (or dare I say, metamorphosed) by their Prague experience, there is the Franz Kafka

museum.

The food in Prague is, in a word, a delicious. We ate roast duck with dumplings at Pivnice Stuparska on our first night, followed by tasty dining at Lokal (great goulash), and then a few visits to our favourite, U Medvicu (try the ♦ meter of sausages and/or the scrumptious duck breast with red cabbage) and various sausage places for lunch (U Glaubic was a favourite).

When we departed Prague to go to Cessky-Krumlov and then Plsen, we had a dilemma for our last night before heading on to Vienna.

Should we stay one more night in Plsen (where we also found a wonderful restaurant) or head back to Prague?

And after finding out that the direct bus took only one hour to return to Prague, and that our hotel had room to accommodate us, we happily returned 'home' to enjoy the sights and sounds and crowds and photographic opportunities and to spend, again, one final night in the city.

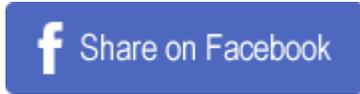
Flexibility on any trip is a key component along with adaptability. It's so important to fulfill the reason for taking a trip in the first place or, from the client perspective, understand what is important to the tenor or mood of the trip.

What is the ambiance that the client wants to surround themselves with? If it's a go-with-the-flow type trip and change is possible, then a travel professional is ideally suited to suggest what kind of options are available. If no changes are possible, then the travel professional can maximize the client's enjoyment by providing those experience-

based (or client/anecdote-provided) tidbits that they picked up while visiting the city on their own or on a fam trip, and providing the client to special VIP insider information.

Prague was an amazing experience but the Czech Republic as a whole is a wonderful destination to suggest to your clients.





Steve Gillick

A tireless promoter of "infectious enthusiasm about travel", Steve delivers his wisdom once a month in his column *The Travel Coach*.

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