

Jewish Traveler

By Maxine Silverstein

PRAGUE

I have always wanted to visit Prague in the Czech Republic. Both my children traveled there while they were doing study abroad programs in college. They loved this city and encouraged us to visit. This past June, we were invited to the American Express Representative Excellence trip to Prague and Vienna. Our travel company is affiliated with American Express, and this was an award trip for their top travel agencies. We were thrilled and excited to finally be in Prague, and we were not disappointed at all. The friendly and warm people, fabulous sightseeing, reasonable prices and delicious food make this a great place to visit.

The Jewish Community of Prague (JCP) has a long and rich history that dates back to the 10th century. This community is one of the oldest in Europe, rich in history, legend and tragedy. The community was confined to a ghetto until 1781 when Josef II issued the Edict of Tolerance. This edict permitted the free exercise of religion and the secularization of education, science and art. The Jewish town is called Josefov to this day in honor of Josef II. Later, the Nazis all but annihilated Prague's Jewish community, and although the post-war communists did little to alleviate the persecution and many inhabitants chose to emigrate overseas, Josefov is still a

vibrant part of the city.

There are about 1,500 registered Jews at the Jewish Community of Prague (JCP) now and the estimate is about 5,000 Jews living in Prague. It was much higher before World War II, when many Jews died in the Terezin concentration camp, just outside



Center of Prague

of Prague. The Prague Jewish community is the biggest in Bohemia and Moravia. The Jews in Prague try to manage their lives together and to bring back the old heritage and legacy. The Jewish community runs two kosher restaurants, Shalom in the Jewish Community building and King Salomon located on Siroka Street. There are also four orthodox synagogues in Prague.

The Jewish Museum of Prague is the starting point for an exploration of Prague's Jewish past and present. Created in 1906 as a symbol of Czech Jews' assimilation,

the museum manages the synagogues and the old Jewish cemetery. It possesses one of the world's richest collections of religious and domestic objects, manuscripts, paintings and engravings gathered before the war. The reason that the main buildings and cemetery in the Jewish quarter are still intact is that Hitler intended to transform the quarter into an epitaph to a vanished culture. The Jewish Museum supervises the Old Jewish Cemetery, the Old Ceremonial Hall and the Pinkas, Klausen, Maisel and Spanish Synagogues but not the Old New Synagogue. The highlight of our trip was our visit to the old Jewish quarter. The Old Jewish Cemetery was the final resting place for Prague Jews from the 14th century until 1747. Some 12,000 graves are said to be piled one on top of the other. The Old New synagogue is the oldest still working synagogue in Europe and was built in the 13th century. Despite fires and Nazi occupation, it remains today the spiritual center of the Jewish community. This Jewish Quarter is amazing. Please allow at least a full day to enjoy all its marvelous sights.

We also found a little free time to experience the Czech cuisine and found it to be quite good and very reasonable. The seafood was fresh and delicious, and we found some great local wines available in the city. Some of our favorite places were: David Restaurant, a quaint and charming place located by the American Embassy, and U Zavoje, an excellent restaurant

and wine bar. We sat outside and loved this place. We also tried Celnice, a casual fun restaurant and beer hall.

The shopping was also great. We found good buys on handmade Czech toys and puppets, interesting antiques and beautiful ceramic pottery.

Now is the time to visit before the Czech Republic changes over to the euro. It's great to find an exciting, interesting and fun European city that still has bargain prices. Go soon, I know that you

will enjoy every single minute in this wonderful city. ☆



Maxine at the Jewish cemetery in Prague.

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