TOUR CODE

CZ7

ADVENTURESABROAD

CZECH REPUBLIC & SLOVAKIA

with Budapest, Hungary

16 days

Updated 05/01/2013

Day 1 *Arrive in Prague*

Today we arrive in Prague and transfer to our hotel.

Prague lies on the seven hills flanking the banks of the Vltava River with the most outstanding views being from Prague Castle. Sometimes it is called Prague the Golden, sometimes Prague the City of 100 Spires. It is compared with Florence and Rome in its beauty. Thomas Mann said it was one of the world's most magical cities; Goethe called it the prettiest gem in the stone crown of the world. Virtually untouched by war, its architecture is Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, Neoclassical, Empire and Art Nouveau.

Overnight in Prague. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Prague: Prague Castle & Old Town*

Our morning sightseeing tour of Prague travels through the city centre to Prague Castle. We begin our WALKING tour near Pohorelec Square before the Cernin Palace. As we head towards the castle we will pass the following: Strahov Monastery, the Loreta, the Cappucin Monastery, and the Archbishop's Palace. Before entering the castle, we will pause by the wall for a city panorama and orientation before our 2-hour visit of the castle.

We enter into first courtyard with its famous fountain and walk over to the Chapel of the Holy Cross. We continue to the St. Vitus Cathedral and visit the choir and crypt before heading to the third courtyard. Here we enter the Old Palace from St. George Square and then continue toward the Golden Lane (Kafka's House) where we pause for a break and refreshment, and then carry on the Old Castle Steps with photo stops along the way.

We will stop at Nikolas Church before crossing the ancient Charles Bridge (Karluv Most), an artistic masterpiece famous for its vendors and artists. For over four hundred years, this work of art, built by King Charles IV in 1357, was the only link between the two halves of Prague. We admire the many sculptures as we walk across. We finish the formal part of our tour in the Old Town, an excellent spot for lunch. The afternoon is free to further explore this amazing city.

Overnight in Prague. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Prague: Old Jewish Quarter & Wenceslas Square*

Our WALKING tour today takes us to the Old Jewish Quarter and the old Town Square with its famous town bell and astronomical clock.

The Old Jewish Cemetery is an incredible sight. The second oldest in Europe, it was established in the 15th century. Burials took place from 1439 to 1787. Today there are 12,000 tombstones jammed together, leaning one on another, every one at a different angle and size, the whole creating a graphic and surreal image. We also visit the museum/memorial and the Klaus Synagogue with a permanent exhibition called "Jewish Customs and Traditions"

highlighting the significance of the synagogue and Jewish festivals.

We continue to the Old Town Square. The 15th century designer of the astronomical clock located here was master clockmaker Hanus of Ruze. According to legend, he was blinded by Prague's town councilors for fear that he would make another like it for another town; so magnificent and applauded was his creation. One day toward the end of his life, he asked a friend to lead him to his great creation. As the figure of Death tolled the hour, Hanus thrust his hand into the clock's apparatus; the clock stopped, and it was centuries before a craftsman could be found who was skilled enough to make it work. In World War II, the clock is said to have stopped again after the Nazi murder of hundreds of citizens of Prague.

We finish our walking tour at Wenceslas Square in time for lunch (your own account). The balance of the day is at leisure. Prague is famous for its concert halls: The Municipal House, Rudolfinium, Mozart Theatre, National Theatre, The State Theatre -- all of them close to the center of the city with performances almost every night. Your Tour Leader can help organize optional evening activities.

Overnight in Prague. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Prague - Konopiste - Karlstejn - Karlovy Vary*

After our morning departure from Prague we visit the Renaissance chateau of Konopiste and its priceless interiors. Set in a hilly wooded park, this castle was built as a stronghold at the end of the 13th century, the present appearance dates from alterations made at the turn of the 19th to 20th century by the last owner, Franz Ferdinand d'Este.

After a lunch break we enjoy a tour of the Karlstejn Castle, a Gothic fortress and home to the imperial crown jewels. After our visit we continue east toward the famous spa of Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad). This town is beautifully located in the valley of the Tepla River and is famous for being one of the oldest and largest health spas in Europe. The hot medicinal spring water is famous the world over.

Overnight in Karlovy Vary. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Karlovy Vary*

This morning we have a half-day WALKING tour of Karlovy Vary, an elegant spa town, and favourite retreat of crowned heads and international celebrities. "When the disorder becomes a disease, doctors prescribe the hot waters of Carlsbad." Our walking tour will take in all the sights, including the many springs and the graceful Mill Colonnade. A ride up the nearby funicular provides us with great views of the surrounding landscape of beech and oak forests.

The afternoon is at your leisure in this charming town.

Overnight in Karlovy Vary. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Karlovy Vary - Marianske Lanze - Cesky Krumlov*

This morning we depart for Marianske Lazne. The historic centre of the town stretches along the spa colonnade with its unique singing fountain and the main avenue lined with pastel coloured Art Deco facades. Most of the old state spa buildings date from the second half of the 19th century and are set amidst thickly forested hills. After our visit we depart for Southern Bohemia, where many towns have a Bavarian or Austrian flavour. In the late afternoon we arrive in the town of Cesky Krumlov.

Medieval arcades and etched Renaissance facades in apricot, beige, and pea-green shades; rust-red, pink, and golden Baroque buildings surround this cobble stoned square with a Plague Monument (Morovy sloup) in its centre. Here you can explore the square, the side streets, and the winding River Vltava that separates the Old Town from the towering castle. This is undoubtedly one of the most exquisite towns in the Czech Republic.

Overnight in Cesky Krumlov. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Cesky Krumlov: Castle Tour*

Cesky Krumlov is undoubtedly one of the most exquisite towns in the Czech Republic, and always a favorite among travellers. Today we will visit the mighty Renaissance castle of Cesky Krumlov, once the seat of the powerful Lords of the Rozmberks and the Schwarzenbergs. The castle houses a rich collection of period furniture, tapestries and historical weapons. The present castle complex is one of the largest in Central Europe and was recorded on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1992

The great castle complex dominates the town of Cesky Krumlov. Under the Castle Complex lies the old town with its winding alleys and venerable Gothic and Renaissance houses. The historical centre of the town is on the UNESCO Heritage list, and after our castle tour the rest of your day will be free to stroll in this historical city centre. Explore the backstreets, visit the small shops and cafes, and wander the pathways along the river.

Overnight in Cesky Krumlov. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Cesky Krumlov - Telc, Czech Republic - Bratislava, Slovak Republic*

This morning we travel through the spectacular countryside of carp ponds to the medieval town of Trebon. The houses lining the thin main square are as romantic as they come, and the three gateways of the town wall have survived from the 16th century. After our visit in Trebon, we continue on to the historic town of Telc. The town of Telc dates from the 16th century and the historic houses which surround the central square are all linked by continuous arcades. In 1992 UNESCO added the historic centre of Telc to the World Heritage List.

We continue to travel through the rolling hills of Southern Moravia, a region famous for its orchards and vineyards. Picturesque villages, towns and chateaux punctuate the landscape. After crossing the border into the Slovak Republic we will travel through the Small Carpathians, a thin strip of limestone hills altogether different from the soft, pine-clad hills of the Czech lands.

In the late afternoon we will arrive in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. Bratislava is situated on both banks of the Danube and a promontory of the Little Carpathians. During the second half of the 20th century, Bratislava finally became a Slovakian city where an ambitious rebuilding and restoration program has transformed the city.

Overnight in Bratislava. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Bratislava - Trencin: Castle Tour*

Our morning city tour takes us to the main sights of Bratislava, including the historic Old Town, the Gothic Cathedral of St Martin, and the 14th century Tower of St Michael in the ancient city walls.

After lunch in Bratislava we travel to Trencin in western Slovakia. Upon arrival we enjoy a walking tour of Trencin,

including Trencin Castle. Together with Nitra and Bratislava, Trencin is one of the oldest of Slovak cities, chronicled as early as in the 11th century. Its strategic location near three Carpathian Mountain passes on the crossroads of commercial routes, has always determined the character of the city as a significant landmark. As early as in the ancient times, the famous Jasper Road used by the Etruscan, Greek, and later Roman merchants to transport precious jasper from the Baltic region, was crossing Trencin.

The city is dominated by Trencin Castle, which is the third-largest castle in Slovakia. Trencin Castle, with extensive fortifications, has several palace buildings that surround the central medieval tower. Today this remains the highest point of the city. Below the castle, on the hillside, is a small square that is reached by a historic covered stairs as well as by winding side streets. The old town also has a large main square, with a large baroque church and a variety of shops.

Overnight in Trencin. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Trencin - Bojnice - Ruzomberok - Horny Smokovec*

Today's journey takes us via Bojnice, a small town in the center of the country at the upper Nitra River. This is one of the oldest spa towns in Slovakia and home to the famous Bojnice Castle, which we will visit during our stop here. We will take a short walk through the town itself is situated just below the castle. We will also stop today in the town of Ruzomberok situated in the Vah River Valley. Established by German colonists in 1223, Ruzomberok became renowned for its guilds, industrial production, tinkers and craftsmen.

Horny Smokovec is the gateway to the High Tatras National Park, founded in 1948 and forming the northernmost section of the Carpathian Mountains. This geographic region is home to numerous glacial lakes and has a distinctly alpine character.

Overnight in Horny Smokovec. Hotel Bellevue or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Pieniny National Park*

Our sightseeing for today takes us first to the Pieniny National Park, crown jewel of the most impressive areas of natural beauty in central Europe. Our visit to the park region will include a tour of the medieval Cerveny Klastor, at one time a Carthusian monastery. Adjacent to the monastery runs the Dunajec River, a natural border dividing Slovakia and Poland. From here we will continue on to the open-air museum of folk architecture in Stara Lubovna. This visit gives us the opportunity to walk amongst a collection of precious wooden houses dating from the late 19th century to the early 20th century.

After lunch we continue on to the town of Kezmarok where part of our tour includes a visit to the famous German built wooden Lutheran Church, a unique work of great carpentry and artistry. From here we return to Horny Smokovec.

Overnight in Horny Smokovec. Hotel Bellevue or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Horny Smokovec - Bratislava*

Today we journey back to Bratislava, a scenic route through the mountain ranges of the High Tatras to the Low Tatras -- mountain peaks and hiking trails, still green forests, bubbling streams, and haystacks like miniature, peak-roofed houses. We arrive in the mid-afternoon.

Overnight in Bratislava. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Bratislava, Slovak Republic - Budapest, Hungary*

This morning we travel by train from Bratislava to Budapest, the capital of Hungary. Hungary is a land of beautiful monuments and romantic music. Buda and Pest, two of the city's three regions, both face the mighty Danube, which forms the physical and spiritual centre of the Hungarian capital. It is its centrepiece, its heart, and its pulse. Its relationship with the city is even more intimate than that of the Seine with Paris or the Arno with Florence.

On arrival we will embark on a walking tour of city's urban heart. This area is full of stately old buildings, grand avenues, and innumerable tiny streets. We will take local transport to the huge neo-Gothic Parliament (Orszaghaz), the most visible building of Budapest's left bank. Built by 1000 workers between 1885 and 1902, this building has now become the symbol of the capital with its slender towers, spacious arcades, high windows and vast central dome. Nearby one can see the magnificent building housing the Museum of Ethnography. Walking southeast we come to the stately and sprawling Liberty Square (Szabadsag ter). In the square's center remains a gold hammer and sickle atop a white stone obelisk, one of the few monuments to the Russian 'liberation' of Budapest in 1945. Passing by Roosevelt Square we soon come to the famous Chain Bridge, the oldest and most beautiful of the seven road bridges that span the Danube in Budapest. Before it was built, the river could be crossed only by ferry or by a pontoon bridge that had to be moved when ice blocks began floating downstream in the winter.

We continue along the pedestrian 'Promenade' with great views of Gellert Hill and Castle Hill on the opposite bank. We will stroll past the Concert Hall (Vigado), which is a curious mix of Byzantine, Moorish, Romanesque and Hungarian motifs. From here we walk to one of the liveliest places in Budapest, Vorosmarty Ter, a large square that the north end of Budapest's best known shopping street--Vaci Utca. This is a fantastic pedestrian-only area of the city that has undergone a full transformation over the last 10 years.

Eventually we will arrive at the famous 19th century Central Market Hall. This cavernous three-story market teems with people browsing stalls packed with everything from salamis and red-paprika chains to folk embroideries and souvenirs. We finish our day back at our hotel with a break before dinner.

Overnight in Budapest. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Budapest: City Tour*

This morning we depart our hotel by private bus for Heroes Square where we will disembark and learn of the history of Hungary as it pertains to the monument. We then WALK over to Vajdahunyad Castle before continuing to St. Stephen's Basilica for a quick look inside. We will pass by the Parliament buildings continuing toward Margaret Bridge over which we cross to Buda. We drive along the water and continue up to the castle area. Our next stop is the Citadel -- good for panoramic views. Our bus leaves us for the day, allowing us to continue on foot to the Fisherman's Bastion.

After a lunch break we reconvene in front of the Plague Monument from where we proceed to St Matthias Church. After visiting the church we will walk down Tarnok Utca to the Royal Palace. At the Royal Palace we visit the National Gallery, devoted exclusively to Hungarian Art.

At this point you are free to continue independent exploration, or return to the hotel. One of the highlights of our Eastern European tours is using the local transport in each city -- most travellers truly enjoy the experience. Your Tour Leader can help plan the rest of your day.

Overnight in Budapest. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Budapest: At Leisure*

The day is yours to explore on your own. You may choose to return to the promenade, explore a museum, or enjoy a coffee and cake in one of the many coffeehouses. The coffeehouse has a long tradition in Budapest; at the turn of the 20th century there were more than 400 coffeehouses in the city, many of them patronized by struggling writers. The coffeehouse was a cornerstone of Budapest literary life.

Overnight in Budapest. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Departure*

Departure from Budapest.

BON VOYAGE!! Meal plan: Breakfast.