

PRAGUE

Gigi Griffis

10
LOCALS

**TELL YOU
WHERE TO GO,
WHAT TO EAT, &
HOW TO FIT IN**



Unconventional Travel Guides

PRAGUE

10 Locals Tell You Where to Go, What
to Eat, & How to Fit In



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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is for people who want to see another side of Prague.

To stroll past the main attractions, but also find the hidden-away park with the best views of the castle. To discover that the most beautiful time to visit the Charles Bridge is early morning—before the tourist bustle begins. Or to see Prague from a unique perspective on a walking tour led by one of the city’s homeless (for details on this, see page 41).

In other words, this book is for people who want to get under the skin of another culture. Who want to rent apartments and live in local neighborhoods. Who want to eat in tiny restaurants without English menus. Who want to make friends with locals. Who want to deepen their experience of Prague.

Think of this as a supplement to your traditional guidebooks.

Use those for their handy place histories, lists of local hotels (if that’s your style), restaurant pricing charts, and basic language lessons. And then use this to go deeper—to figure out how to find the most authentic neighborhoods, the most delicious restaurants in the city center, and that hidden-away beer garden just outside the city.

Getting excited? Me too. (Just wait till you read some of these interviews!)

Now, a little orientation:

This book is split into 10 interviews with people who live all over Prague. Some were born and raised in the region. Others are expats who have fallen in love with their new city. And all of them love showing travelers the best their city has to offer.

Below each person’s name, you’ll see a short bio designed to help you understand his or her background. If you are passionate about food, look for someone whose short bio includes “foodie” or “chef.” If you’re a culture lover, look for a culture lover. If you live for music, check out our Czech Jazz Expert. And so on and so forth.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Many of the interviewees are also tour guides, artists, business owners, or bloggers. Watch for web addresses under their interviews if you'd like to learn more about their art, blogs, businesses, or tours.

Finally, a note on Czech grammar: Czech place names and street names follow a different capitalization rule than English. So don't be surprised when you see the first word of a proper noun capitalized while the second and third are not. You'll notice this throughout the book and likely on signs and maps once you get to Prague.

Now, then, into the book...

THE INTERVIEWS



Tony Emmerson

Teacher. Music Writer. Czech Jazz Expert.

About Tony

I was born in Derbyshire, England, but moved to London for university and stayed, addicted to big city life. We moved to Prague in 2006 when I got a job as Head of Science in an English-speaking Czech secondary school. As an unashamed former Cold Warrior with an interest in post-Communist Europe, as well as a love of Central European culture, it was an opportunity that I couldn't turn down.

Since moving here, I've become involved with the Czech jazz scene, with my words occasionally turning up in newspapers, CDs, and concert programs, as well as on various websites.

There's little that keeps me in contact with the UK apart from cricket and Radio 4; some habits of a lifetime are destined to remain just that. Gardening, fine dining, and watching ice hockey keep me out of trouble on a day-to-day basis.

What To Do In Prague (The Basics)

If you are interested in classical music or opera, the State Opera and the National Theatre are essential. It is here that you will see excellent performances at relatively modest prices that are genuine cultural events in the city, rather than just "take the cash and bang it out" recitals for the benefit of tourists.

For jazz, AghARTA and Reduta are both good clubs. At the latter, you can sit in the same seat that Bill Clinton occupied when he visited Prague in 1994 and played a duet with President Havel on saxophone. They are very much listening venues, rather than places to sit and talk with music in the background, so you can see a very high standard of performance.

THE INTERVIEWS

For something less music-centric, Old Town is beautiful; it truly deserves its reputation. Always look up because almost every building is a work of art. If you shuffle around with your nose in a guidebook or your smartphone, you'll miss the best bits. A walk by the river is also strongly recommended.

Hidden Gems for Seasoned Travelers

Jazz fans who visit regularly should focus on artists rather than venues in order to see some of the best performers in Europe doing their thing in intimate surroundings.

The leading pianist, Emil Viklický, performs around the world, but he also frequently plays in Prague clubs. He has collaborated with Bill Frisell, Bobby Wellins, Marcus Printup, George Mraz, and many others, receiving critical acclaim and a loyal following. His modern jazz interpretations of Moravian folk songs are as beautiful as they are skillful and seeing Emil play them in a small Prague club has to be the quintessential Prague jazz experience.

Luboš Andršt is the Czech Republic's very own guitar legend. Writer, arranger, front man, respected collaborator, he doesn't say much, but his fingers do the talking. He has two regular bands at the moment. Luboš Andršt Group is a jazz outfit, while the Luboš Andršt Blues Band is reminiscent of the 1960s British electric blues sound.

They call František Uhlíř "The Paganini of the Bass" and the title suits him well. He is another of the master class of Czech musicians who play internationally but still can be seen in Prague clubs. He wrings every drop of melody out of his instrument, innovating and improvising, making it sing like few others can. His own band, František Uhlíř Team, plays both his compositions and jazz standards with humor panache.

As for hidden gems outside the music scene, if you are looking for somewhere to have reasonably priced but sumptuously surrounded drinks, the Kavárna Lucerna, just off Wenceslas Square, is all 1920s glory and style.

THE INTERVIEWS

If you're up at the castle, U Černého Vola (located at *Loretánské náměstí 107/1*) is a must-visit pub. It's a local watering hole that tourists visit, rather than the other way around, so low-key and polite is the way to be if you don't want to stand out and be scowled at.

Where to Stay

Karlín was a pretty grim area until the 2002 floods, when it was rebuilt and is now a thriving and forward-looking district that gives a taste of non-tourist Prague without being too far from the center. The same goes for *Smíchov*; it is very authentically Prague.

"In a country full of pretty towns, Český Krumlov stands out as the fairest of them all."

Photo by Giannis Pitarokilis on Flickr.



Day Trips

In a country full of pretty towns, Český Krumlov stands out as the fairest of them all, remaining remarkably unspoiled despite being on the UNESCO hit-list of places to stand around in the streets looking confused and taking photographs.

The spa town of Karlovy Vary is also worth a visit, especially if you are here during the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. Whether drinking the water is actually beneficial is up for debate, but it tastes bad enough to be healthy. You can also go walking in the nearby forests.

If mountains are your thing, the resort town of Špindlerův Mlýn is good year-round; you can walk in the summer months and ski in the winter.

THE INTERVIEWS

What to Eat

For typical Czech food, I recommend *svíčková* (beef in a creamy sauce traditionally served with dumplings). It has a unique taste and is, perhaps, the signature dish of authentic Czech cuisine.

There are also some superb soups easily available, with two of the most interesting and flavorful being garlic soup and *kulajda*, which is a dill soup with potatoes, mushrooms, and vinegar.

Obviously, the country is known for beer and over the last few years the number of smaller brewers and outlets willing to serve their products has remained healthily high. Pilsner Urquell is perfectly drinkable, but it is not the jewel in the crown of Czech beers, whatever the marketing men say. Look out for Bernard, Svijany, and Kocour.

Where to Eat (Favorite Bars & Restaurants)

Over the last few years, the food scene has exploded. People are now interested in buying from local producers and eating fresh and interesting food. New restaurants are springing up all the time, seemingly on a weekly basis, so it would be useless to make any lasting recommendations; checking Twitter or searching for blogs will give you up-to-date views from Prague residents.

Of the established places, Bellevue (at *Smetanovo nábřeží 329/18*) is one of the finest restaurants I've ever visited, although its sister restaurant, Mlýnec (at *Novotného lávka 199/9*), not only serves great food, but also offers spectacular views of Charles Bridge. Both of these restaurants specialize in adapting traditional Czech cooking in a modern and interesting way.

If you want something simpler, the signature steak and chips at Café de Paris (at *Maltézské náměstí 537/4*) are hard to beat.

How to Fit In

I hate generalizing about the Czechs (I certainly don't fit in with many perceptions of the British), but a couple things do stand out. People

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