

## **PRAGUE: THE JEWEL IN THE HEART OF EUROPE**

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Since November 17, 1989 when I watched with awe as East and West Berliners knocked down the wall that separated them and in fact was the icon that separated the Communist world from the “free world,” I have wanted to make a trip to the East. I had not been in that part of the world since 1966 when I stopped in East Berlin on a flight to Warsaw. So much has changed since the events of 1989 as many of the former nations have become independent, broken apart from other nations, have joined the European Union, and welcomed tourists from around the world and especially the United States.



**Prague’s architecture reflects its 1000 year history. (Courtesy photo)**

We decided to visit a city that was filled with historical charm dating back to the ninth century. Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, had in fact been the capital of the former Czechoslovakia. We had been told that it was a magical city whose golden architecture reflected its golden historical, cultural, and social

core. We were not disappointed. The city incorporates a variety of styles ranging from Romanesque to Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque as well as Classicism, Art Nouveau, and Cubist. It sums up well Prague's more than 1000 year history as the capital city of the Czech state. Its historical and architectural core is so outstanding that it was added to UNESCO's list of world heritage in 1992. It is truly an architectural and cultural gem.

We enjoyed our visit through three hotels: the Art Nouveau style Radisson SAS Alcron Hotel (<http://prague.radissonsas.com/>) in the heart of downtown Prague; the Four Seasons Hotel ([www.fourseasons.com/prague/](http://www.fourseasons.com/prague/)) on the river's edge in historic Old Town; and the Parkhotel Pruhonice (<http://www.park-hotel-prague-pruhonice.cz>) nestled next to the botanical gardens in the quiet suburb of Pruhonice.

Stella, my interior designer spouse, was impressed at how meticulously the Alcron had been restored to its 1932 Art Deco style with glittering chandeliers, Italian marble, and creamy milk glass. The high-speed WiFi internet was a nice 21<sup>st</sup> century touch. The Four Seasons Hotel Prague brings what one expects of a Four Seasons hotel to the banks of the scenic Vltava River across from Prague Castle and a few steps from the internationally renowned Charles Bridge. The distinctive furnishings, personalized service, and state of the art technology are Four Seasons trademarks. We experienced the feeling of staying in a small Czech neighborhood at the Parkhotel Pruhonice) in the shadow of the Pruhonice Castle and botanical gardens in Pruhonice, a suburb just twenty minutes from downtown Prague. With just 28 rooms it was more like a boutique hotel where we could experience living in a delightful Czech community.

We joined thousands of Czech "football" (soccer) fans as they watched their team play in the World Cup on gigantic screens set up in Old Town Square. After the game we checked out the full-size figures that performed on the hour in the astronomical clock at Old Town Hall. Death rang the bell and inverted his hourglass while the twelve apostles nodded to the crowd as they paraded past the window above the clock. Stella then joined other tourists as they paraded across the street to Moser and its incredible collection of Bohemian crystal. We later crossed the river on the famous Charles Bridge, admiring its 30 statues. The view of the city from the bridge was just wonderful as were the crown jewels of Bohemian kings at the gigantic St. Vitus Cathedral, part of Prague Castle on the other side. We learned that it took over 600 years to complete this edifice. A visit to Josefov, the Old Jewish Quarter, with its seven synagogues, Jewish Museum, and Jewish Cemetery was especially moving.

Dining experiences were memorable especially the fabulous seafood in the award-winning fish & seafood Alcron restaurant and our tasty al fresco breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the Parkhotel Pruhonice. We gazed at Old Town Prague and its historic architecture from Terasa U Zlate Studie restaurant that overlooks the city from on high. The grilled pikeperch with fennel, tomato, and vuccola pesto that followed a pate of foie gras starter served with Hennessy Fine Cognac gelatine were superb. After enjoying both a Mediterranean Veal Tonnato, as well as several traditional Czech dishes, such as roasted duck with red cabbage and corn soup with pan fried foie gras prepared by Chef Vito Mollica at the Four Seasons Hotel's Allegro Restaurant, we can understand why it has been named the #1 restaurant in Prague for the last three years.

Prague is indeed the jewel in the crown in the heart of Eastern Europe.

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\* A former teacher, curriculum specialist, and superintendent of schools, **Dr. Charles L. Mitsakos** is professor of education and chair of the education division at Rivier College. He is the author or co-author of more than twenty history, geography, and social studies textbooks, workbooks, and multimedia programs for elementary and secondary schools. He has served as educational consultant to schools and school districts in fifteen states, U. S. Virgin Islands, U. S. Department of Defense Dependents Schools, and Ministries/Departments of Education in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, and Jamaica. He is a past president and now serves as treasurer of the Social Science Education Consortium, an affiliate of the National Council for the Social Studies. A freelance travel writer, Dr. Mitsakos has had articles published in periodicals throughout New England.