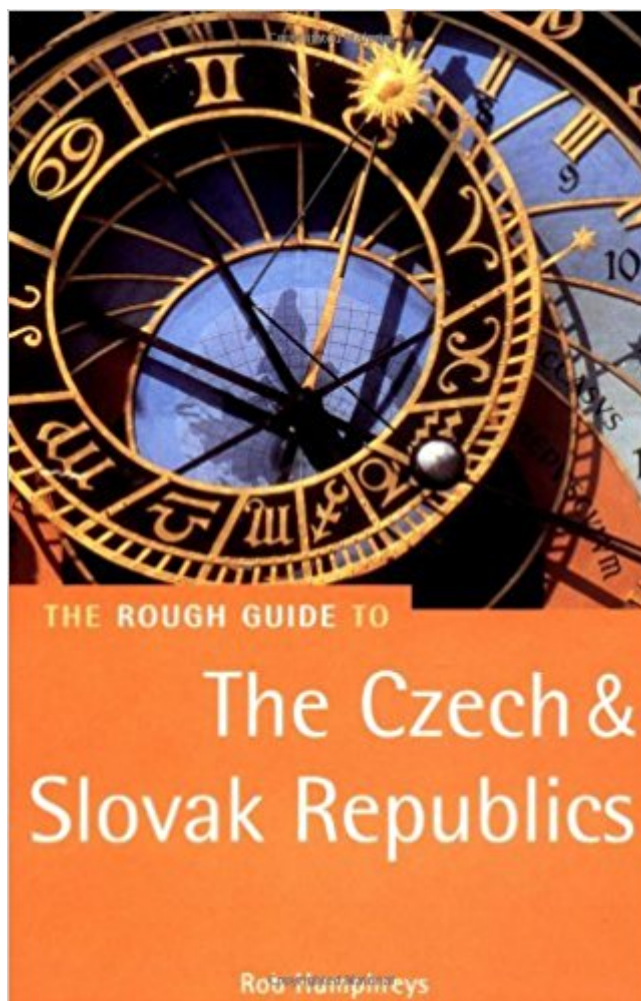


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The Rough Guide To The Czech & Slovak Republics



Synopsis

This guide gives background information on all aspects of culture and history. It discusses the politics of the area from the Hapsburg dynasty to the break-up of Czechoslovakia, as well as coverage of the countryside and critical reviews of restaurants and accommodation in every price range.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

WHERE TO GO AND WHEN Almost entirely untouched by the wars of this century, the Czech capital, Prague, is justifiably one of the most popular destinations in Europe. Poised at the centre of Bohemia, the westernmost province, Prague is also the perfect base from which to explore the surrounding countryside. Both the gentle hills and forests of South Bohemia, one of central Europe's least-populated regions, and the famous spa towns of West Bohemia – Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně and Františkovy Lázně – are only a couple of hours’ drive from Prague. Pine-covered mountains form Bohemia’s natural borders, and the weird sandstone "rock cities" in the north and east of the region are some of its most memorable landscapes. Moravia, the eastern province of the Czech Republic, is every bit as beautiful as Bohemia, though the crowds here thin out significantly. The largest city, Brno, has its own peculiar pleasures – not least its interwar functionalist architecture – and gives access to the popular Moravian karst region, plus a host of other nearby castles and chateaux. The north of the province is often written off as an industrial wasteland, but Olomouc is a charming city, more immediately appealing than Brno, and just a short step away from the region’s highest

mountains, the Jeseniky and Beskydy. Although the Slovak capital, Bratislava, can't compare with Prague, it does have its virtues, not least its compact old town and its position on one of Europe's great rivers, the Danube. Slovakia also boasts some of Europe's highest mountains outside the Alps: these have long formed barriers to industrialization and modernization, preserving and strengthening regional differences in the face of Prague's centralizing efforts. Medieval mining towns like Banská Ľupča, Utiavica and Kremnica still smack of their German origins, and the cathedral capital of the east, Kouice, was for centuries predominantly Hungarian. In the Orava and Liptov regions, many of the wooden-built villages, which have traditionally been the focus of Slovak life, survive to this day. Carpatho-Ruthenia, in the far east bordering Poland and the Ukraine, has a timeless, impoverished feel to it, and is dotted with wooden Greek Orthodox churches and monuments bearing witness to the heavy price paid by the region during the liberation of World War II. In general, the climate is continental, with short, hot summers and bitterly cold winters. Spring and autumn are often both pleasantly warm and miserably wet, all in the same week. Winter can be a good time to come to Prague: the city looks beautiful under snow and there are fewer tourists to compete with. Other parts of the country have little to offer during winter (aside from skiing), and most sights stay firmly closed between November and March. Taking all this into account, the best months to come are May, June and September, thereby avoiding the congestion that plagues the major cities and resorts in July and August. Prague in particular suffers from crowds all year round, though steering clear of this high season will make a big difference. In other areas, you may find yourself the only visitor whatever time of year you choose to go, such is the continuing isolation of the former Eastern Bloc countries' nether regions.

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