

South Bohemia



For many travellers, the lakes, forests and fields of South Bohemia whiz by in a cinematic scroll from the window of a bus from Prague to Český Krumlov. And while the region's pampered main attraction will steal your heart, be ready to share your devotion with busloads of other suitors. Stroll the medieval maze of Český Krumlov, but also seek out tranquillity and history elsewhere in South Bohemia.

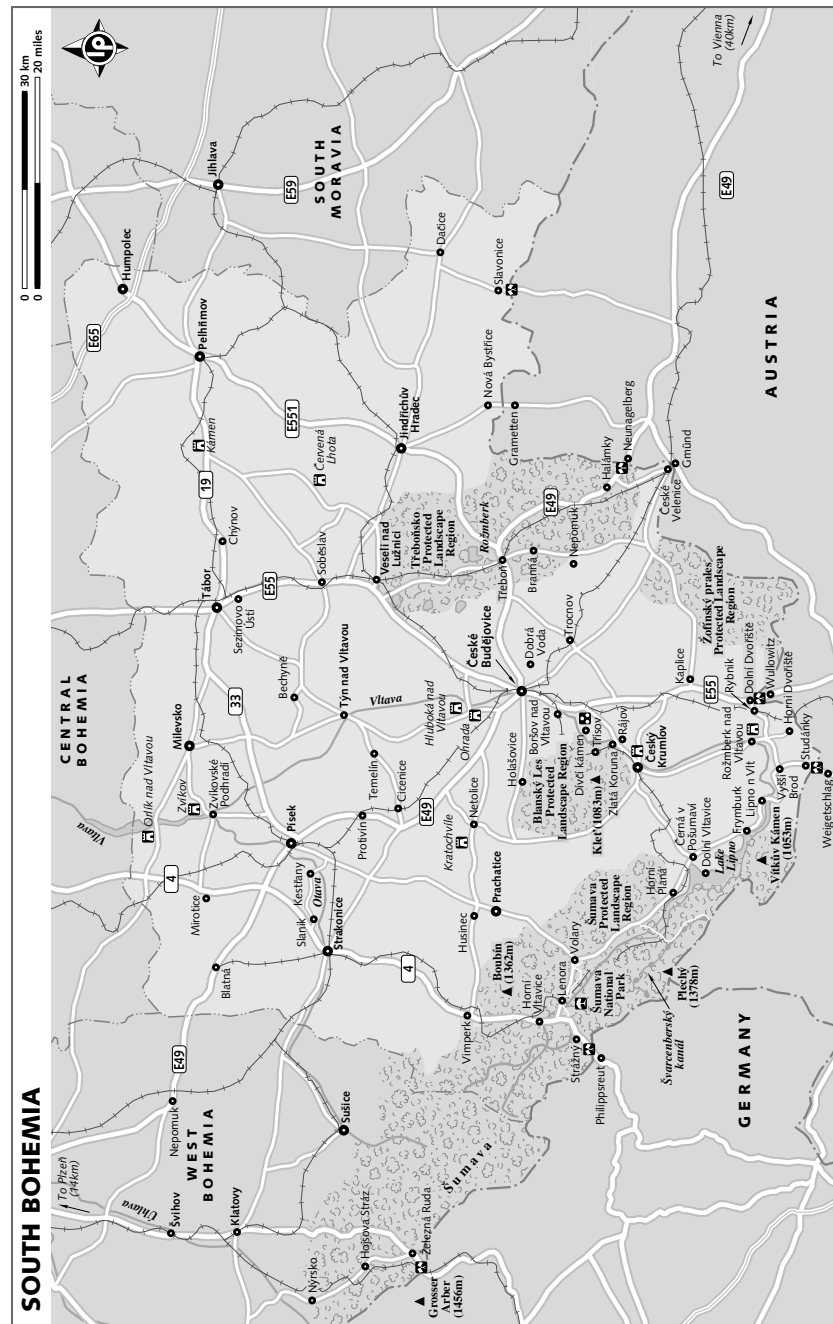
High in the forests of the Šumava mountains, hiking and mountain biking tracks link comfortable *pensjons* and alpine lodges where hush comes as standard. Near the Austrian border, the melancholy serenity of Slavonice almost demands you whisper. And when things get too relaxed, head to the whisper-free beer halls of České Budějovice. Don't expect tranquillity though, but remember it's not good to drink on your own anyway.

After a few beers with the locals, bring history to life in the chateaux dotting every corner of the region, from the delicate lakeside confection at Červená Lhota, to the imposing architectural diversity of Jindřichův Hradec. Enduring traces of Austrian and German culture linger, blending with the legacy of earlier eras. Get pleasantly lost amidst the narrow lanes radiating from the photogenic main square of Tábor, the imposing bastion of the unyielding Hussites, or take a leisurely boat cruise to discover the spectacular twin castles of Zvíkov and Orlik.

All the while, give yourself a round of applause and a glass of Budvar lager for not settling for that hurried day trip from Český Krumlov. This spectacular and idiosyncratic region demands much more of your attention.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Climb the castle tower in **Český Krumlov** (p172) for stunning views of Central Europe's prettiest town
- Bring history to life in the former Hussite bastion of **Tábor** (p190)
- Immerse yourself in the hushed Renaissance perfection of **Slavonice** (p198)
- Overcome castle overkill by getting active in the stunning landscapes of the **Šumava** (p178) mountains
- Imbibe the original Budweiser beer in **České Budějovice** (p164), an energetic blue-collar brewery town



National Parks & Trails

No other region of the Czech Republic offers as many outdoor activities as South Bohemia. Throughout the region are swathes of protected areas from the rugged wilderness of the Šumava National Park to the Třeboňsko Protected Landscape Region. Between České Budějovice and Český Krumlov are the rolling forests of the Blanský Les Protected Landscape Region. Good public transport and a comprehensive network of accommodation and well-marked hiking and cycling tracks make it easy to maximise your time. If you're not keen on getting around on two feet or two wheels, then take to the water, either on the meandering Vltava river, or on Lake Lipno, the Czech Republic's largest manmade body of water.

HIKING

Hiking is best enjoyed in the Šumava National Park (p178), which has many well-marked trails leading to the most interesting areas of the park. In the Třeboňsko Protected Landscape Region (p176), hiking is concentrated around the 15th-century fishponds stretching from Třeboň to Veselí nad Lužnicí. Another popular hike is the summertime ascent of Klef (1083m) in the Blanský Les Protected Landscape Region (p175). There is good horse-trekking around Český Krumlov (p174).

CYCLING

The rolling hills and forests of South Bohemia are tailor-made for cycling. Two most popular routes are the Upper Vltava River Valley Greenway from Hluboká Nad Vltavou to Český Krumlov, and the Bohemia Lake District Greenway from Jindřichův Hradec to Třeboň. Both are part of the Prague–Vienna Greenways System, which is a web of trails and country roads joining the Czech and Austrian capitals (see www.praguevienna.greenways.org). A popular long distance ride in the Šumava (p178) is the 240km long 'Šumavská magistrála' that traverses the park west to east.

From July to August (Saturday and Sunday only in June and September), special buses with attached cycle trailers provide transport around seven routes covering all of South Bohemia (see www.cyklotrans.cz Czech and German only). These routes also link with bus and train stations in the region. Maps outlining cycling day trips are available from most tourist information offices.

WATER SPORTS

Rafting and canoeing are most popular on the Vltava river, with Český Krumlov (p173) and Vyšší Brod (p182) the starting-off points. Don't expect roaring white-water though. Most trips are exceedingly leisurely and ideally include a few stops at riverside pubs. Yachting, kiteboarding and windsurfing are all available on Lake Lipno (p183).

ČESKOBUDĚJOVICKO REGION

ČESKÉ BUDĚJOVICE

pop 95,000

As the birthplace of one of Europe's finest brews, in České Budějovice they take their beer very, very seriously. The town's original brewery supplied the Holy Roman Emperor back in the 13th century, and now the town's namesake Budvar lager (the original and authentic Budweiser) goes head to frothy head with Pilsner Urquell, from Plzeň to the west.

The town's main square is one of the largest in Europe; elegant arcades radiate to streets filled with lively bars – the ideal spot to sample the town's amber gold. Near the river, urban order is abandoned and the austere lines of the main square dissolve in a charming labyrinth of narrow lanes and winding alleys. The town's industrial suburbs now sprawl across the plains of South Bohemia, but its historical heart retains the laid-back appeal of the simple brewing town it used to be.

History

The marshy site, ideal for the defence of a medieval fortress, was selected by King Přemysl Otakar II in 1265 as a royal town and a bulwark against powerful local families.

Its ancient predecessor, the village of Budi-vojovice, was at the present site of the church of St Procopius & John the Baptist (kostel sv Prokopa sv Jana Křtitele), north of the centre in the suburb of Pražské sídliště.

By the 14th century České Budějovice was the most powerful town in South Bohemia. Its many fine Renaissance buildings testify to its wealth from trade and silver mining. It remained staunchly royalist and Catholic during the Hussite Wars, though it was never attacked by Hussite armies. The royal mint was established here in the late 16th century.

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Prosperity continued until the Thirty Years' War, when a disastrous fire (in 1641) destroyed half the town. The silver also began to run out and the royal mint was closed.

České Budějovice only began to recover with the establishment of a major school in 1762 and a bishopric in 1785. Industry arrived when the first railway train on the continent travelled from here to Linz, Austria, in 1832.

After WWI the southern part of South Bohemia was given to Czechoslovakia, although more than half its population was German. Though Germans and Czechs had coexisted peacefully for centuries, after WWII all Germans were expelled from České Budějovice in 1945.

Orientation

From the adjacent bus and train stations, it's 1km along Lannova třída to the town centre. Parking is cheaper outside the old town.

Information

EMERGENCY

Jihočeský autoklub (☎ 386 356 566; Žižkova třída 13) Offers motoring assistance.

Police station (☎ 974 221 111; Pražská 5) Has a section for foreigners.

INTERNET ACCESS

Both charge 60Kč per hour:

Internet Café Babylon (5th fl, náměstí Přemysla Otakara II 30; ☎ 10am–10pm Mon–Sat, 1–9pm Sun)

Na Půdě (Krajinská 28; ☎ 8am–10pm)

LEFT LUGGAGE

There are left-luggage offices at the **bus station** (☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-2pm Sat) and the **train station** (☎ 5am-noon & 12.30-7pm).

MEDICAL SERVICES

24-hour pharmacy (☎ 387 873 103) At the hospital.
Hospital (nemocnice; ☎ 387 871 111; B. Němcové 54)

MONEY

Česká spořitelna (cnr náměstí Přemysla Otakara II & U Černé věže) Changes money and has an ATM.
KB (Krajinská 19) Changes money and has an ATM.

POST

Main post office (Pražská 69) Open 24 hours. Another branch on Senovážné náměstí.

TOURIST INFORMATION & TRAVEL AGENCIES

Čedok (☎ 387 763 202; náměstí Přemysla Otakara II 39; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) Bus and train tickets and books accommodation.

CTS (☎ 386 360 543; 1st fl, náměstí Přemysla Otakara II 38; ☎ 8.45am-12.15pm & 12.45-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Stocks maps and books accommodation.

Municipal Information Centre (Městské Informační Centrum; ☎ 386 801 413; www.c-budejovice.cz; náměstí Přemysla Otakara II 2; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Books tickets, tours and accommodation.

Sights & Activities**NÁMĚSTÍ PŘEMYSLA OTAKARA II**

This eclectic jumble of arcaded buildings centred on **Samson's fountain** (Samsonova kašna; 1727) is the broadest plaza in the Czech Republic, spanning 133m. Among the architectural treats is the 1555 Renaissance **town hall** (radnice), which received a baroque face-lift in 1731 from AE Martinelli. The allegorical figures on the balustrade – Justice, Wisdom, Courage and Prudence – are matched by an exotic quartet of bronze gargoyles.

Off the square on U Černé věže is the dominating, 72m Gothic-Renaissance **Black tower** (Černé věž; ☎ 386 352 508; adult/concession 25/15Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), built in 1553. Climb its 225 steps (yes, we counted them) for fine views. The tower's two bells – the Marta (1723) and Budvar (1995; a gift from the brewery) – are rung daily at noon.

Beside the tower is the **cathedral of St Nicholas** (katedrála sv Mikuláše), built as a church in the 13th century, rebuilt in 1649 and made a cathedral in 1784.

AROUND THE OLD TOWN

The old town is surrounded by Mlýnská stoka, the Malše river and extensive gardens where the walls once stood. Only a few bits of the Gothic fortifications remain, including **Rabenštejn tower** (Rabenštejnská věž; cnr Hradební & Panská; adult/concession 40/20Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), and the 15th-century **Iron Maiden tower** (Železná pana; Zátkovo nábřeží), a crumbling former prison.

Along Hroznová, on Piaristické náměstí, is the **church of the Sacrifice of the Virgin** (kostel Obětování Panny Marie) and a former **Dominican monastery** with a splendid pulpit. Enter the church from the Gothic cloister. Next door is a medieval **armoury** (zbrojnice) that was also a salt warehouse; and the **South Bohemian Motorcycle museum** (Jihočeské Motocyklové; ☎ 723 247 104; Piaristické náměstí; adult/concession 40/20Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), which has a fine collection of Czech Jawas and WWII Harley-Davidsons.

Return up to Česká, turn right and follow it to Radniční. Right into Biskupská takes you past the 18th-century **bishopric** (biskupství; admission free; ☎ 8am-6pm May-Sep). Enter through a small gate in the wall.

Follow Zátkovo to dr Stejskala. Pass the **South Bohemian theatre** (Jihočeské divadlo) and continue to JV Jirsika. Right into Dukelská, is the **museum of South Bohemia** (Jihočeské muzeum; ☎ 387 929 328; adult/concession 50/20Kč; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1-5.30pm Tue-Sun), with an extensive collection covering history, books, coins, weapons and wildlife.

A small **museum of the Horse-Drawn Railway** (Památky koněpřežní železnice; ☎ 386 354 820; Mánesova 10; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1-5pm Tue-Sun) is south of the centre, near the Koh-i-noor factory – only for horsey types and/or railway buffs.

BUDVAR BREWERY

Touring the modern **Budvar brewery** (pivovar; ☎ 387 705 341; www.budweiser.cz; cnr Pražská & K Světlé; adult/concession 100/50Kč; ☎ 9am-4pm) with all its sights, smells and science is less interesting than product sampling in the city's beer halls. Nevertheless, a pilgrimage to the home of Budvar, 3km north of the city (take bus 2), is still mandatory. Book the 60-minute tour in advance by phoning the brewery, or through the tourist information office. Ask for the English language tour.

Afterwards put your feet up in the attached **Budvar beer hall** (☎ 10am-10pm).

Sleeping

Accommodation can get tight in July and August, so book in advance. Prices fluctuate seasonally – these are high (summer) season rates. In the low season discounts can be as much as 25%.

BUDGET Hostels

The **municipal information centre** (Městské Informační Centrum; ☎ 386 801 413; www.c-budejovice.cz; náměstí Přemysla Otakara II 2; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) and **CKM Travel Agency** (☎ 387 424 505; Lannova třída 63; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri), near the train station, can arrange accommodation in dormitories from 150Kč per person. All the listed tourist offices can book private rooms for about 300Kč.

Pension U výstaviště (☎ 387 240 148; trpakdl@email.cz; U výstaviště 17; r per person 270Kč; (P)) The closest thing to a travellers hostel, this student accommodation block is 30 minutes west of the city centre on bus 1 (board outside the bus station). Go to the fifth stop (U parku), and the **pension** is 100m along Čajkovského, on the right.

Kolej jihočeské univerzity (☎ 387 774 201; Studentská 13-19; d 440Kč; ☎ Jul-Sep; (P)) Another student block, 2km west of the centre.

Pension Mottlová (☎ 386 357 135; Alešova 5; s/d 350/700Kč) In a quiet street you'll get a warm welcome from both the hosts and their cocker spaniel. Shared bathrooms only.

Camping

Stromovka Autocamp (☎ 387 203 597; tent/3-bed bungalow 60/600Kč; ☎ Apr-Oct; (P)) Just past Dlouhá Louka Autocamp, this has so-so bungalows and ample tent space. Queues for the showers can be long.

Motel Dlouhá Louka Autocamp (☎ 387 203 601; www.dlouhalouka.cz; Stromovka 8; tent/s/d 65/600/1000Kč; (P)) This motel and camp site is 2km southwest of town (take bus 6 from in front of Městský dům kultury). Camp from May to September, or take a rather uninspiring motel room year-round.

MIDRANGE

Small private **pensions** are often a better deal than hotels.

AT Pension (☎ 603 441 069; www.atpension.cz; Dukelská 15; s/d incl breakfast 550/900Kč; (P)) Don't hold your breath for stunning (or even late-20th-century) décor, but this convenient spot is mighty friendly with mighty big breakfasts.

Penzión Centrum (☎ 387 311 801; www.penziocentrum.cz; Biskupská 130/3; s/d incl breakfast 900/1200Kč) Huge rooms with satellite TV, queen-size beds with crisp white linen, and thoroughly professional staff all make this a top reader-recommended spot near the main square.

Hotel Bohemia (☎ 386 354 500; www.bohemiacb.cz; Hradební 20; s/d incl breakfast 1490/1790Kč; (P)) Carved wooden doors open to a restful interior in two old burghers' houses in a quiet street. The restaurant comes recommended by the tourist information office.

Other recommendations:
Penzion Barbara (☎ 736 426 472; www.penzionbarbara.cz; Siroká 15; s/d 500/1000Kč) A newish spot with light and bright rooms above a cosy kavárna. Look for the letters 'BB' on top of the building.
Penzion Garni (☎ 386 353 475; www.budweb.cz/penzion-garni; Na Mlýnské stoce 7; s/d incl breakfast 800/950Kč; (P)) Located on quiet Mill Race Lane, the Garni shares a building with Caffè Piccolo, a terrific spot for espresso and hot chocolate.

TOP END

Hotel Klika (☎ 387 318 171; www.hotelklika.cz; Hroznová 25; s/d incl breakfast 1630/2300Kč) A riverside location sometimes let down by off-hand service, but the modern rooms are light and airy, and anywhere that integrates 14th-century walls into their design is OK by us.

Hotel Malý Pivovar (☎ 386 360 471; www.maly pivovar.cz; Karla IV 8-10; s/d incl breakfast 2300/3300Kč; (P) ☎ ☎) With a cabinet of sports trophies and sculptured leather sofas, the lobby resembles a gentleman's club. However the elegant rooms will please both the men and the ladies, and it's just a short stroll to the cosy Budvarka beer hall downstairs.

Hotel Dvořák (☎ 386 253 140; dvorakcb@genea2000.cz; náměstí Přemysla Otakara II 36; s/d incl breakfast 2400/2900Kč; ☎ ☎) Don't be fooled by the elegant façade: the Dvořák's rooms are modern and clean but lacking in character. The friendly staff and good-value last-minute specials (up to 40% off) still make this a worthwhile standby.

Grand Hotel Zvon (☎ 387 311 384; www.hotel.zvon.cz; náměstí Přemysla Otakara II 28; s/d 2500/3000Kč; ☎ ☎) 'Since 1533' says the sign but we're sure the city's top hotel has been renovated since then. The ritzy façade across three main square buildings is let down by the standard rooms, but the executive rooms (add a whopping 80% to listed prices) would be classy in any town.

Eating CAFÉS

Fresh Salad & Pizza (Hroznová 21; pizza 100Kč & salads 60Kč) Have a healthy lunch at this spot near the Motorcycle museum. Add extra horsepower to your jerk chicken or couscous and salmon salads with one of eight different dressings.

Caffé Bar Piccolo (Na Mlýnské stoce 9; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Thu, 7.30am-10pm Fri & Sat) Down by the old Mill Race this friendly spot serves up bracing coffee and decadent hot chocolate.

RESTAURANTS

Try the local carp from nearby Třeboň.

pizza/grill (Panská 17; pizzas 100Kč; ☎ closed Sun) Just maybe where the phrase 'hole-in-the-wall' came from, pizza/grill fits a wood-fired oven, a vintage espresso machine, and seating for five diners into a tiny space. Grab takeaway *pivo* 'n' pizza and dine *al fresco*.

U Tří Sedláku (☎ 387 222 303; Hroznová 488; mains 100-160Kč) Locals celebrate that nothing much has changed at U Tří Sedláku since it opened in 1897. Tasty meaty dishes go with the Pilsner Urquell constantly being shuffled to busy tables.

Indická (Gateway of India) (☎ 386 359 355; 1st fl, Chelčického 11; mains 100-150Kč; ☎ closed Sun) From Chennai to České comes respite for travellers wanting something different. Request spicy because they're used to dealing with timid Czech palates.

Vino z Panské (☎ 387 318 511; Panská 14; mains 110-170Kč; ☎ closed Sun) If you're feeling all *pivo*'d out, there's a good selection of wines in this relaxed restaurant in the old town's Gothic section. The best wines are only available by the bottle so bring some friends.

Restaurant Beran (☎ 386 359 559; Žižkova 3; mains 100-250Kč) Follow the cast-iron goat's head above the door, into the eclectic interior with a 2m-tall model of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Beran is very popular with locals who jam-pack this cellar bar/restaurant for Czech, Italian and Mexican food.

Drinking PUBS

Singer Pub (Česká 55) With Czech and Irish beers, and potent cocktails, don't be surprised if you get the urge to rustle up something on the Singer sewing machines on every table. If not, challenge the regulars to a game of *foosball* with a soundtrack of nicely noisy rock.

Potrefená Husa (Česká 66) CB's bright young things come out to play at this spot owned by Prague's Staropramen brewery. With tasty bar snacks, Belgian beers, and a summer terrace overlooking the water, the burghers of Budvar might be a tad concerned at the enemy in their midst.

CLUBS

Černej velbloud (☎ 728 725 419; www.velbloud.info; U tří lvů 4; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Fri, 3pm-midnight Sat & Sun) One half is a cruisy *kavárna* with occasional live music and eclectic snacks, and the other half a camel-bedecked (*velbloud* means 'camel') unpretentious venue with lots of interesting sounds. In any week you'll hear anything from old-school ska to drum 'n' bass.

modrý dveře (☎ 386 359 958; Biskupská 1; ☎ 10am-midnight) By day, modrý dveře is a welcoming bar/café with vintage pictures of US singer and Rat Pack member, Frank Sinatra. At dusk the lights dim for regular jazz piano gigs on Wednesdays (from 7pm) and live blues and jazz on Thursdays (from 8pm). Tell them Frank sent you.

Entertainment

DRAMA, CLASSICAL MUSIC & CINEMA

South Bohemian theatre (Jihočeské divadlo; ☎ 386 356 643; www.jihoceskedivadlo.cz; dr Štejskala 23) The city's main theatre presents plays (usually in Czech), operas and concerts.

Children's theatre (Malé divadlo; ☎ 386 352 508; Hradební 18) Puppets and pantomime.

Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra of South Bohemia (☎ 386 353 561; www.music-cb.cz; Kněžská 6) Performances take place in the church of St Anne.

Conservatory (konzervatoř; ☎ 386 110 410; Kanovnická 22) This Stalinist shoebox hosts classical music performances.

Cinestar (☎ 385 799 999; www.cinestar.cz in Czech; Obchodní Centrum (tři Dvory)) One kilometre west of the centre, this multiplex shows Hollywood's latest (90Kč).

SPORT

Budvar Arena (☎ 386 107 111; www.hokejcb.cz; FA Gerstnera; ☎ Sep-Apr) Ice hockey matches are staged here. Contact the tourist information office for details.

Plavecký Stadion (☎ 387 315 784; ☎ 10am-8pm) This sports hall has swimming pools and saunas open to the public.

Getting There & Away BUS

From České Budějovice, direct buses (☎ 386 354 444) go to Prague Rožtyly (142Kč, three hours), Jihlava (90Kč, 2½ hours), Tábor (56Kč, one hour) and Český Krumlov (28Kč, 50 minutes).

TRAIN

There are fast, direct trains (☎ 387 854 361) to Plzeň (162Kč, two hours), Tábor (88Kč, one hour), Prague (204Kč, 2½ hours) and Jihlava (162Kč, 2½ hours).

Twice a day there are trains to and from Linz, Austria (2¼ hours, 125km). Three times daily trains go to Linz with a change at the border stations (Horní Dvořiště and Sumerau).

Trains between Prague and Vienna connect at České Velenice, 50km southeast of České Budějovice. Two daily trains run to and from Vienna (Franz-Josefsbahnhof) with a change in Gmünd.

Getting Around

The city is well connected by bus (8Kč). The main **taxi stand** (☎ 800 141 516; Lannova 1) is by the train station.

To rent a car, see **Čedok** or **Europcar/Rekrea** (☎ 387 312 290; Široká 12; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri).

Bikes (230Kč per day), rafts (650Kč per day) and canoes (180Kč per day) can be hired at **Sport BP** (☎ 387 318 439; Sokolovský ostrov 1; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-6pm Mon-Fri, to 11.30am Sat). Expect to pay a 1500Kč deposit.

SHOCart GeoClub's *Českobudějovicko* (1:75,000) map shows local cycle routes.

JAN ŽIŽKA

Hussite Count Jan Žižka was born in Trocnov, just outside České Budějovice, in 1376. He spent his youth at King Wenceslas IV's court and fought as a mercenary in Poland, but returned to the Czech kingdom at the beginning of the Reformation and became the leader of the Taborites (p190). His military genius was responsible for all of the Hussite victories, from the 1420 Battle of Žižkov onwards. After losing both eyes in two separate battles, Žižka eventually died of the plague in 1424.

Žižka's army was highly organised and was the first to use a system of wagons with mounted artillery – the earliest tanks in history. These vehicles allowed him to choose where to draw up position, taking the initiative away from the crusaders and making them fight where he wanted. The technique proved almost invincible.

The Hussites successfully saw off their enemies for a decade following Žižka's death, but were defeated by a combined army of the rival Hussite faction of the Utraquists and the Holy Roman Empire in 1434. Surprisingly, Žižka's invention was not incorporated into other armies until Sweden's King Gustavus II Adolphus adopted it two centuries later.

AROUND ČESKÉ BUDĚJOVICE Trocnov

The birthplace of Hussite hero Jan Žižka is 12km southeast of České Budějovice and has a small **museum** (☎ 387 995 235; www.pamatnikjz.cz; adult/concession 30/15Kč; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Sep) dedicated to him. From České Budějovice there are at least six daily buses (15Kč, 28 minutes).

Holašovice

South Bohemia is well known for its ornate, 19th-century 'folk baroque' country houses and barns. Some of the best examples are in the tiny village of **Holašovice** (www.holasovice.cz, in Czech), a Unesco World Heritage Site 15km west of České Budějovice.

Traditionally, holidays and festivals were celebrated in the large square complete with a pond and chapel, and each spring maypoles are still erected in many villages to celebrate the end of winter. There are four buses daily from České Budějovice (15Kč, 30 minutes).

Kratochvíle

This attractive Renaissance **chateau** (☎ 388 324 380; tours in Czech/English 60/120Kč; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, to 4.15pm May & Sep, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct) was completed in 1589 for the Rožmberk family and is decorated inside with stucco reliefs and murals based on classical mythology. Kratochvíle is also home to an interesting **museum of Animated Film**, with examples from notable Czech producers like Jiří Trnka and Hermína Týrlová.

Take a bus to Netolice from České Budějovice (28Kč, 40 minutes) or Prachatice (20Kč, 25 minutes); walk the remaining 1.5km.

HLUBOKÁ NAD VLTAVOU

pop 4800

Crowned with a stunning chateau, this little village draws visitors from across the country. Most tourists depart after seeing the castle, making Hluboká a pleasant place to stay if accommodation is tight in České Budějovice.

Information

Česká spořitelna (Masarykovo 38) changes money and has an ATM.

The **tourist information centre** (☎ 387 966 164; www.hluboka.cz; Masarykovo 35; ☎ 9am-6pm) publishes a useful map and has internet access for 1Kč per minute.

Sights

A crow pecking the eyes from a Turk's head, the grisly crest of the Schwarzenberg family, may be the recurrent motif in the décor of the **Hluboká chateau** (☎ 387 843 911; www.zamekhluboka.cz in Czech; ☎ 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Jun, 9am-4.30pm Apr, Sep & Oct) but this grisly image is totally at odds with the building's overt romanticism.

Built by the Přemysl rulers in the latter half of the 13th century, Hluboká was taken from the Protestant Malovec family in 1662 for supporting an anti-Hapsburg rebellion, and sold to the Bavarian Schwarzenbergs. Two centuries later, they gave the chateau the English-Tudor, Gothic-style face it wears today, modelling its exterior on Britain's Windsor Castle. Crowned with crenellations and surrounded by a dainty garden, Hluboká is too prissy for some, but this remains the second-most visited chateau in Bohemia after Karlštejn, and for good reason.

There are two tours through the chateau: the **main tour** (adult/concession 80/40Kč, in a foreign language 150/80Kč) passes through the Schwarzenberg's ceremonial chambers, including the private apartments of Duchess Leonora, the ornate reception rooms and the grandiose large dining room with space for 72 guests. A dash through the armoury provides a contrast. The **second tour** (adult/concession 80/50Kč, in a foreign language 150/80Kč) delves into the chateau's unique kitchen, where the families' favourite recipes are still on show.

Unless the chateau is crowded, tours do not run between 12.30pm and 1pm and the last tour commences an hour before closing time. The chateau grounds are open year-round, free of charge.

The exquisite **South Bohemian Aleš gallery** (Alšova jihočeská galérie; ☎ 387 967 041; www.aig.cz; adult/concession 40/20Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-6pm May-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Apr) is to the right of the castle gate, in a former riding school (jízdárna). On display is a fabulous permanent collection of Czech religious art from the 14th to 16th centuries, plus 17th-century Dutch masters and changing exhibits of modern art.

Sleeping & Eating

The tourist information centre can recommend private rooms. Also watch for 'Zimmer frei' or 'privát' signs along Masarykovo.

Autokemping Krivonovska (☎ 387 965 285; tent/bungalow per person 65/220Kč; ☎ May-15 Sep; P) Three kilometres north of Hluboká at Krivonovska, this place includes bungalows.

Pension Kalivoda (☎ 387 965 608; www.kalivoda.info; Nádražní 528; s/d incl breakfast 600/800Kč; P) The friendly Kalivoda is just across the river in the suburb of Zámostí.

Hotel Štekl (☎ 387 967 491; www.bohemiangold.cz; s/d incl breakfast from 3500/3900Kč; P) Originally part of the castle, the Štekl was converted in 1997 into an opulent hotel where it's now easy to feel like a lord or a lady.

Pizzeria Ionia (☎ 387 963 109; Masarykova 33; pizza 90Kč) Opposite the tourist office, Ionia is generous with their pizza toppings and the amount of red, green and white paint they've splashed on to create a suitably Italian ambience.

Getting There & Away

Buses run from České Budějovice to Hluboká's main square every 30 to 60 minutes (16Kč, 20 minutes).

AROUND HLUBOKÁ

The baroque **Ohrada chateau** (☎ 387 865 340; www.nzm.cz; adult/concession 40/20Kč; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Jul-Aug, 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun May & Sep, 9am-2pm Tue-Fri to 3.30pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct) is 2km southwest of Hluboká. A former Schwarzenberg hunting lodge, it's now a museum of hunting and forestry featuring wildlife, hunting trophies and odd furniture made from antlers. A small **zoo** is attached.

Public transport is irregular, but the castle is a pleasant walk from Hluboká.

ČESKÝ KRUMLOV

pop 14,000

Crowned by a spectacular castle, and centred on an elegant old town square, Český Krumlov is a pocket-sized Prague. Renaissance and

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baroque buildings enclose the meandering arc of the Vltava river, housing riverside cafés and bars. Following architectural neglect during the communist era, the undeniable fairy-tale beauty of Český Krumlov is radiant again, with thoughtful restoration transforming the heritage buildings lining the narrow lanes into cosy restaurants and classy boutique hotels.

After earning a spot on Unesco's World Heritage List in 1992, Český Krumlov has become the Czech Republic's second busiest tourist town after Prague. Visit in summer and it may feel like a theme park, with street performers punctuating every corner, and tour buses overwhelming the car parks. But come a few months either side of July and

August and the narrow lanes and footbridges will be (slightly) more subdued and secluded. Floating lazily down the river will still be possible, and you'll experience a more authentic old-world charm.

If you're willing to forego languid days on the Vltava, winter is the most enchanting time of all, with the castle blanketed in snow as pine smoke from chimneys wafts across the river.

Orientation

With an irregular shape, Český Krumlov can be tricky to navigate. Use the chateau tower and church of St Vítus as landmarks.

From the main bus station it's a short walk southwest to the Inner Town (Vnitřní Město), centred on náměstí Svornosti. The Lazebnický bridge (Lazebnický most) takes you to Latrán, a warren of shops beneath the chateau.

The main train station is in the northern part of Český Krumlov, 1km from the chateau (turn right from the station, take the first left and continue downhill on třída Míru).

If you're driving, note that parking in the old town is permit-only (ask your hotel to issue you one). There are public car parks just outside the centre.

Information

BOOKSHOP

Shakespeare & Sons (☎ 380 711 203; Soukenická 44; ☎ 11am-7pm) Good for English-language paperbacks. Cult movies are screened in a downstairs cinema (p175).

EMERGENCY

Police (☎ 158; náměstí Svornosti 1)

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafés charge around 60Kč per hour.

Café Internet (☎ 380 712 219; Zámek 57; ☎ 9am-9pm) Next to Unios Tourist Service (right); also offers international phone calls through the internet.

Infocentrum (☎ 380 704 622; www.ckrumlov.cz; náměstí Svornosti 1; per 5 min 5Kč; ☎ 9am-8pm Jul-Aug, to 7pm Jun & Sep, to 6pm Apr, May & Oct; to 5pm Nov-Mar)

LAUNDRY

Laundromat Lobo (☎ 380 713 153; Latrán 73; 140Kč per load; ☎ 8am-8pm) Self-serve washing machines and dryers.

LEFT LUGGAGE

Unios Tourist Service (☎ 380 725 110; www.unios.cz; castle courtyard Zámek 57; ☎ 9am-6pm) Stores baggage for 5Kč per hour per item.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital (nemocnice; ☎ 380 761 911; Hřbitovní 424) One block east of the bus station.

MONEY

Banks with ATM and change facilities include the following:

Česká Spořitelna (nr náměstí Svornosti)

Chequepoint (Latrán 5) Changes money (no ATM) until late.

Raiffeisen Bank (náměstí Svornosti 15)

POST

Post office (Latrán 81) Also has an exchange office.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Infocentrum (☎ 380 704 622; www.ckrumlov.cz; náměstí Svornosti 1; ☎ 9am-8pm Jul-Aug, 8am-7pm Jun & Sep, 8am-6pm Apr, May & Oct; 8am-5pm Nov-Mar) Books accommodation and concert tickets, sells maps, and organises guided tours. Also provides audio guides to the town (100Kč per hour) and internet access (5Kč per 5 minutes).

Oldřiška Baloušková (☎ 737 920 901; Soukenická 44) At the Shakespeare & Sons bookshop; runs interesting walking tours.

Unios Tourist Service (☎ 380 725 110; www.unios.cz; castle courtyard Zámek 57; ☎ 9am-6pm) This private information office provides a similar range of services to Infocentrum.

Vltava Tourist Services (☎ 380 711 988; www.ckvltava.cz; Kájovská 62; ☎ 9am-7pm) Books accommodation and arranges canoeing, rafting and horse riding.

Sights

LATRÁN & KRUMLOV CHATEAU

Perched atop a soaring cliff, and capped by its proto-psychedelic round tower, **Krumlov chateau** (☎ 380 704 721; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Apr, May, Sep & Oct), is one of the most audaciously located sights in South Bohemia.

Český Krumlov was first documented in 1253, when the local ruling barons, the Vítkovcs, built their castle here. In 1302 it was acquired by the lords of Rožmberks, the biggest land owners in Bohemia, and in the late 16th century Vilém Rožmberk ordered a Renaissance-style makeover. When their line expired it was handed to the Eggenbergs in 1622. The Schwarzenbergs took the castle over in 1719, and owned it until 1945.

Approaching from the south, cross the wooden **Lazebnický bridge** (Lazebnický most) and climb to the courtyard via the **Chateau**

steps (Zámecké schody). A more traditional approach is from the north via the **Budějovická gate** (Budějovická brána; 1598); pass the post office and go through the Red gate (Červená brána) into the chateau's first courtyard.

Below the entrance bridge are two brown (and pretty unhappy) bears, traditional residents since the 16th century. Through a passageway is the second courtyard, with the ticket office. Here you can climb the multi-hued **round tower** (válcová věž; adult/concession 30/20Kč; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-4.30pm Apr & Oct, 9.30am-3.30pm Apr & Oct), painted in 1590 by Bartholomew Beránek. Another passageway leads into courtyards three and four, their walls covered in trompe l'oeil painting.

There are three tours: **Tour I** (adult/concession 90/45Kč, in a foreign language 150/75Kč) takes in the opulent Renaissance rooms, including the chapel, baroque suite, picture gallery and masquerade hall, while **Tour II** (adult/concession 70/40Kč, in a foreign language 140/70Kč) covers the Schwarzenberg portrait gallery and more sedate 19th-century interiors.

Just across the bridge behind the chateau is the rococo **Chateau theatre** (Zámecké divadlo), which can only be seen on **Tour III** (adult/concession 100/50Kč, in a foreign language 170/90Kč; ☎ 10-11am & 1-4pm Tue-Sun May-Oct). This amazing theatre is one of the only two left in the world that still has all its original decorated stage set and working wooden machinery. Behind the theatre, a ramp to the right leads up to the former Riding school (Zámecká jizdárna), now a restaurant. Above the school are the serene chateau **gardens** (☎ 8am-7pm Jun-Aug, 8am-6pm May & Sep, 8am-5pm Apr & Oct; admission free).

Back down the hill off Latrán is the **Minorite monastery** and **convent of the Poor Clares** (Minoritský klášter), with pretty gardens providing an escape from the tourist hordes. At the time of writing the monastery and convent were closed for refurbishment. Check with Infocentrum for the current status.

The former armoury is now the **Eggenberg Brewery** (☎ 380 711 225; www.eggenberg.cz; Latrán 27; tours with/without tasting 130/100Kč), built in 1630, and the source of the town's freshest (and cheapest) beer. Book tours at Infocentrum or Unios (see Tourist Information, opposite).

INNER TOWN

South from the chateau along Latrán you pass the former **church of St Jošt** (kostel sv Jošta) on the way to Lazebnický bridge, from where the

Inner Town opens up. The church houses a small **Marionette museum** (Latrán 6; adult/concession 80/40Kč; ☎ 10am-5pm mid-Mar-Oct). Turn right into Parkán to Na ostrově, a tiny island with views across the river to the chateau.

Below the square, in a former brewery, is **Egon Schiele Centrum** (☎ 380 704 011; www.schieleartcenterum.org; Široká 70-72; adult/concession 180/105Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm). Established in 1993, this excellent private gallery has a respectable retrospective of Viennese painter Egon Schiele (1890-1918), who lived briefly in Krumlov in 1911, and raised the ire of townsfolk by hiring young girls as nude models. For this and other sins he was eventually driven out. It also houses temporary exhibitions of other A-list artists.

Continue on Široká and Na louži, and turn left to náměstí Svornosti, with its 16th-century **town hall** and **Marian plague column** (Mariánský sloupek), from 1716. Several buildings feature valuable stucco and painted decorations. See the hotel at No 13 and the house at No 14. Near Infocentrum you will also find the **museum of Torture** (nr náměstí Svornosti & Radniční; adult/concession 80/40Kč; ☎ 9am-8pm) displaying ghoulish implements, and a heavy metal 'iron maiden' in the foyer.

Back at the square, follow Horní uphill and past Kostelní to the 14th-century **church of St Vítus** (kostel sv Víta). Continue on Horní past the 1588 **Jesuit college** (Jesuitská kolej), now housing the plush Hotel Růže.

Opposite is the **Regional museum** (Regionální muzeum v Českém Krumlově; ☎ 380 711 674; www.muzeum.ckrumlov.cz; Horní 152; adult/concession 50/25Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul-Aug, 10am-5pm May-Jun & Sep, 9am-4pm Tue-Fri, 1-4pm Sat & Sun, Mar-Apr & Oct-Dec) featuring folk art from the Šumava region, archaeology, history, fine arts, furnishings and weapons. The highlight is a room-sized model of Český Krumlov c 1800.

Activities

During summer rent a variety of craft for lazy hours on the **Vltava** – canoes, kayaks – even inner tubes. Companies usually offer one-way transport to towns upriver, where you can begin your river journey back to Český Krumlov; around seven hours from Vyšší Brod, five hours from Rožmberk, or three from Branná. En route take things leisurely at riverside beer gardens and camp sites. You can also head north from Český Krumlov to Zlatá Koruna (five hours) and Boršov nad

Vltavu (nine hours). Prices average around 950Kč per day for an open canoe (two persons) and 1350Kč per day for a raft (three to four people). Shorter, less expensive trips are also available. Reliable companies include **Vltava Tourist Services** (p172) and **Maleček** (☎ 380 712 508; www.malecek.cz; Rooseveltova 28). Maleček also runs more sedate river trips through Český Krumlov on wooden rafts seating up to 36 people (280Kč, 45 minutes).

Slupenec Stables (☎ 380 711 052; www.jk-slupenec.cz; Slupenec 1; ☞ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) hires horses for trips and lessons (one/11 hours 250/2000Kč). The stables are 2.5km south of town. Book through Infocentrum (p172). Longer expeditions can be arranged for groups of at least four.

Hire bikes for 320Kč per day from Unios Tourist Service and Vltava Tourist Services (see Tourist Information, p172).

Festivals & Events

Infocentrum sells tickets to major festivals, including the **Chamber Music Festival** in late June/early July, the **International Music Festival** (www.czechmusicfestival.com) during August and the **Jazz at Summer's End Festival** (www.jazz-krumlov.cz) in September. The **Pétillisté Růže Festival** (Five-Petalled Rose Festival) in mid-June features street performances, parades and medieval games (expect a small admission fee).

Sleeping

There are thousands of beds, but accommodation is tight in summer. Winter rates drop by up to 40%.

BUDGET

Expect to pay from 450Kč per person for a private room, often with breakfast included. Inquire at the tourist information offices.

Kemp Nové Spolí (☎ 380 728 305; tent per person 65Kč; ☞ Jun-Aug; Ⓟ) On the right (east) bank of the Vltava, about 2.5km south of town, this rustic camp site gets super-busy.

hostel postel (☎ 380 715 631; www.hostelpostel.cz; Rybářská 35; dm/d 250/600Kč; ☑) Situated near good bars in Rybářská, hostel postel has a sunny courtyard with shady umbrellas to wake you up s...l...o...w...l...y after a big night.

Krumlov House (☎ 380 711 935; www.krumlovhostel.com; Rooseveltova 68; dm/d 300/650Kč; ☑) Perched above the river, Krumlov House is friendly and comfortable, and has plenty of books, DVDs, and local information to feed your inner backpacker. Lots of day trips are on offer.

MIDRANGE

Pension U Pivovaru (☎ 775 963 868; pensionupivovaru@seznam.cz; Pivovarska 181; s/d 800/1300Kč; Ⓟ) In a quiet lane near the town's brewery, the owners also rent bikes and canoes.

Pension Lobo (☎ 380 713 153; www.pensionlobo.cz; Latrán 73; d incl breakfast 1100Kč) Pension Lobo offers more than just spotless and central rooms. See them also for the convenient Laundromat Lobo (p172).

Pension U Černého PSA (☎ 380 712 366; www.pension-cerny-pes.cz; Rooseveltova 36; d incl breakfast 1200Kč; Ⓟ) The name means 'Place of the Black Dog', and the black labrador in the photo outside just begs you to stay. Follow your heart and make the dog happy at this friendly spot with retro '70s furniture.

Hospoda Na Louži (☎ 380 711 280; www.nalouzi.cz; Kájovská 66; d incl breakfast from 1350Kč) The outside dates from 1459, and the interior is early 20th century. In a new century there are now 11 cosy rooms above a great pub (opposite).

U Malého Vítky (☎ 380 711 925; www.vitekhotel.cz; Radniční 27; d incl breakfast from 1450Kč; Ⓟ) Right in the old town stay in comfortable, quirky rooms named after traditional Czech fairy-tale characters.

Pension Barbakán (☎ 380 717 017; www.barbakan.cz; Horní 26; d incl breakfast from 1700Kč; Ⓟ) Originally the town's gunpowder arsenal, Barbakán now creates fireworks of its own with super-comfy rooms featuring polished wooden floors. Its excellent restaurant sits spectacularly above the river.

Hotel Zlatý Anděl (☎ 380 712 310; www.hotelzlatyandel.cz; náměstí Svornosti 10; s/d incl breakfast 1700/2000Kč; Ⓟ ☞ ☞) The Zlatý Anděl's façade may be the slimmest on the main square, but good value and spacious rooms are concealed within.

Other recommendations:

Pension Danny (☎ 380 712 710; www.pensiondanny.cz; Latrán 72; d incl breakfast from 990Kč) Exposed beams plus restored brickwork equals simple charm.

Pension U Galerie (☎ 337 711 829; Rybářská 40; d incl breakfast 1000Kč) Readers have praised the U Galerie's 'good prices and good kitchen'. We agree.

Penzión Ve Věži (☎ 380 711 742; www.ckrumlov.cz/pensionvevezi; Pivovarská 28; d incl breakfast 1200Kč; Ⓟ) Spartan rooms, but where else can you sleep in a Gothic tower with a brewery over the road?

TOP END

Hotel u Václava (☎ 380 715 094; www.uvavclava.cz; Nové Město 25; d 2500Kč; Ⓟ) Four-poster beds create a

romantic atmosphere that's perfect for that first (or second) honeymoon or spontaneous holiday fling. Not recommended for single travellers, but you won't go wrong with a loved one.

Hotel Růže (☎ 380 772 100; www.hotelruze.cz; Horní 154; s/d incl breakfast 4200/5800Kč; Ⓟ ☞ ☞ ☞) CK's flashiest hotel fills the old Jesuit college and is popular with tour groups who welcome its medieval bling. We're not sure about the mannequins in the lobby. Have they escaped from the nearby wax museum?

Eating

Laibon (☎ 728 676 654; Parkán 105; mains 80-160Kč) Candles and vaulted ceilings create a nicely 'boho' ambience in Bohemia's best vegetarian teahouse. Start with Middle Eastern and Indian flavours, and finish with fluffy blueberry dumplings.

Krčma v Šatlavské (☎ 380 713 344; Horní 157; mains 100-150Kč) Nirvana for meat-lovers is this barbecue cellar serving sizzling platters in a medieval labyrinth illuminated by candles and the flickering flames of open grills. Wash it all down with wine served in earthenware goblets. Book ahead.

Cikánská jizba (☎ 380 717 585; Dlouhá 31; mains 100-200Kč; ☞ 3pm-midnight Mon-Sat) Known locally as the Gypsy Room, this is the best spot in town to try the flavours of the Roma with pumping live music at weekends.

Nonna Gina (☎ 380 717 187; Klášterní ul 52; pizza 110Kč) The authentically Italian Massaro family conjure up authentic Italian flavours.

Papa's Living Restaurant (☎ 380 711 585; Latrán 13; mains 120-270Kč) Try the hearty steak 'n' ribs in this riverside ode to the Mediterranean with good food and a silly name.

Potraviný (supermarket; Latrán 55) Picnic anyone?

Drinking

PUBS

Hospoda Na Louži (☎ 380 711 280; Kájovská 66; mains 120-180Kč) Nothing has changed in this wood-panelled *pivo* parlour for almost a century. Locals pack Hospoda Na Louži for tasty dark beer from the Eggenberg brewery and huge meals.

U Dwau Maryí (☎ 380 717 228; Parkán 104; mains 80-175Kč) Dive into the authentic medieval interior and emerge onto a sunny riverside terrace. Inside or outside, the food and drink go down easily in this enjoyably raucous tavern.

CLUBS

Hrozen Music Bar (náměstí Svornosti 7; ☞ 9pm-3am Wed-Thu, 9pm-6am Fri & Sat) If you're into intense beats and foam parties, you'll probably love this Eurotrash kind of place.

Horror Bar (☎ 728 682 724; Masná 22; ☞ 6pm-late) Occasional live gigs surface in this kitschy labyrinth celebrating the (un)dead.

Entertainment

THEATRE & CINEMA

Městské divadlo (☎ 380 711 775; www.divadlo.ckrumlov.cz; Horní 2) The town theatre holds regular performances.

Kino (☎ 380 711 892; Špičák 134) The latest Hollywood fare (80Kč).

Shakespeare & Sons (☎ 380 711 203; Soukenická 44) Cult and art-house films downstairs from a bookshop (p172).

Getting There & Away

Seven buses (140Kč, three hours) and one direct train (224Kč, 3¼ hours) run to/from Prague daily. Buses run all day to/from České Budějovice (28Kč, 50 minutes) and seven times a day to/from Rožmberk nad Vltavou (24Kč, 40 minutes). Eight trains a day run to České Budějovice (46Kč, one hour), with connections to Prague.

AROUND ČESKÝ KRUMLOV

Blanský Les

The **Blanský Les** Protected Landscape Region is good hiking territory, particularly near the summit of the **Klet** (1083m); in winter it is a ski resort. A **chairlift** (adult/concession 60/30Kč; ☞ 9am-5pm Jul-Aug, Wed-Sat May-Jun, Sat & Sun Sep-Feb) climbs to the summit from the car park above Krasetín, 2km from Holubov, where the Český Krumlov-České Budějovice train stops.

Klet can also be reached on foot via a green-marked trail from near Český Krumlov's main train station. Other trails are marked on SHOCart's GeoClub *Českobudějovicko* (1:75,000) map.

Zlatá Koruna

pop 550

Above the Vltava is the wee village of Zlatá Koruna and a well-preserved Gothic **monastery** (Cisterciácký klášter; adult/concession 85/40Kč; ☞ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), founded in 1263 by Přemysl Otakar II to demonstrate his power in the region.

Originally called the Sainly Crown of Thorns, the monastery was renamed the Gold Crown (Zlatá Koruna). The walled complex also houses a **museum of South Bohemian Literature** (Památník písemnictví jižních Čech).

The complex can be visited on regular guided tours (minimum five people; last tour 4.15pm).

INFORMATION

Infocentrum (☎ 380 743 275; www.sweb.cz/zlatakoruna; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Jul & Aug closed Wed) provides maps and helps with accommodation. It is in the Obecní Úrad, just before the monastery.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are private rooms here and in the adjacent village of Rájov, a 1.5km downhill walk south.

Zlatá Koruna Kemping (☎ 777 729 444; www.kemp-koruna.cz; tent per person 70Kč; ☎ May-Sep) This slightly rundown camp site is across the bridge at the bottom of town.

Pension Koruna (☎ 380 743 194; Zlatá Koruna 26; s/d incl breakfast 400/800Kč) Attached to a restaurant, this inn-style place has comfy rooms.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Regular buses run to/from Český Krumlov (13Kč, 15 minutes).

Around Zlatá Koruna

Divčí kámen, a ruined castle above the Vltava, was founded by the Rožmberks in 1349 but abandoned in 1541. It's a robust 7km walk on a red-marked trail by the river, north from Zlatá Koruna.

TŘEBOŇ

pop 8900

Most of the live carp sold on Christmas Eve throughout the Czech Republic come from the centuries-old fish ponds around the spa town of Třeboň. With a fine main square, a pretty chateau, and a good local brewery, the town deserves to be more on the tourist circuit.

Orientation

Old Třeboň is entered through its venerable gates to the main square, Masarykovo náměstí.

The main train station is 1.5km northwest of the old town. There's also a smaller station on the same line, Třeboň Lázně, 800m

northeast. The bus station is 1km due west, off Svobody.

Information

The **tourist information office** (Informační středisko; ☎ 384 721 169; www.trebon-mesto.cz; Masarykovo náměstí 103; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun Jun-Aug, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr-May) helps with accommodation and has internet access.

Česká spořitelna (Masarykovo náměstí 100) changes money and has an ATM. The **post office** (Seifertova 588) is west of the main square.

Sights

AROUND MASARYKOVO NÁMĚSTÍ

The main attractions are the Renaissance and baroque houses on the square and within the town walls, which date from 1527. Don't miss the **town hall** on the square, and **St Giles church** (kostel sv Jiljí) and the **Augustine monastery** (Augustinský klášter) on Husova. The **brewery** (pivovar; Trcnovské náměstí) has been home to Regent beer, one of Bohemia's oldest beers, since 1379. The brewery is closed to the public, but it does have a raucous *pivnice* (beer hall) for sampling its five different brews.

TŘEBOŇ CHATEAU

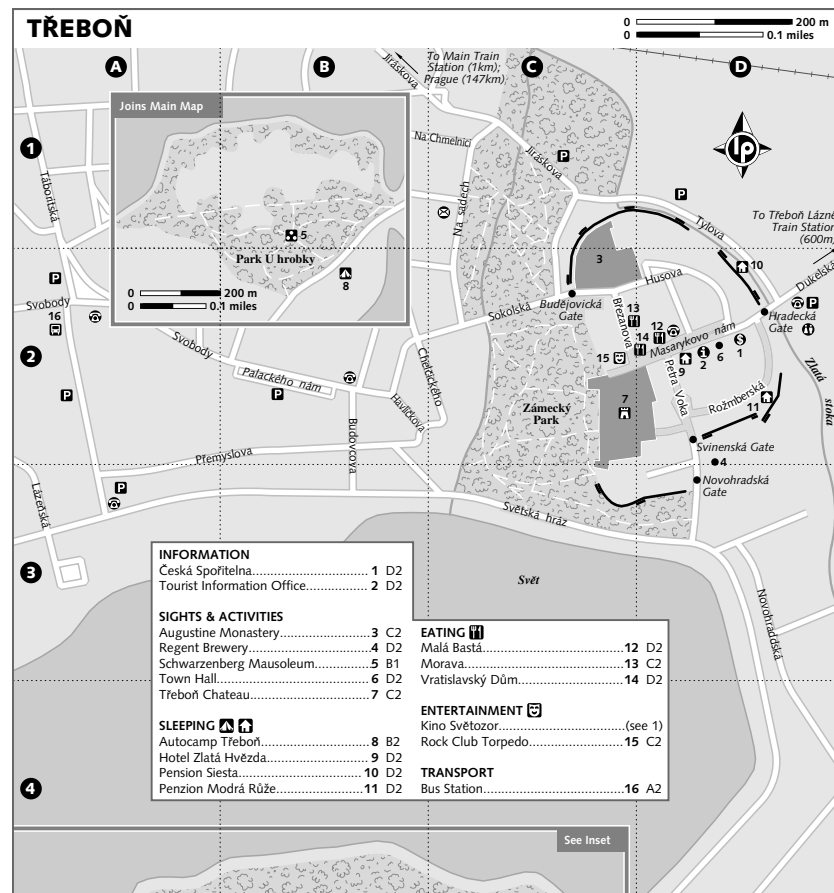
The **chateau** (zámek; ☎ 384 721 193; ☎ 9am-5.15pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, to 4pm Apr-May & Sep-Oct; adult/concession 80/40Kč to 140/70Kč) includes a **museum** with a small collection of furniture and weapons. There are three tour routes to choose from. Enter through a gate (opposite Břežanova) from Masarykovo náměstí or via the courtyard off Rožmberská.

SCHWARZENBERG MAUSOLEUM

Many Schwarzenbergs are buried in this 1877, neo-Gothic **mausoleum** (Švarcenberská hrobka; adult/concession 30/20Kč, in English 60/30Kč; ☎ same as chateau) in Park U hrobky, on the other side of the pond from Třeboň.

TŘEBOŇSKO PROTECTED LANDSCAPE REGION

A good **forest walk** through the Třeboňsko Protected Landscape Region begins at **Masarykovo náměstí**. Following the blue-marked trail northeast to **Na kopečku** (1.5km, 30 minutes). From Na kopečku, keep on the blue-marked trail to **Hodějov Pond** (7.5km, 2½ hours). A yellow trail then runs west to **Smitka**, (2km, 45 minutes) where it joins a red trail heading north to **Klec** and a primitive camp site (6km, two hours).



From there, for a further 13km (four hours), the red trail runs north, past more fishponds, forests and small villages to **Veselí nad Lužnicí**, a major railway junction. Camping is allowed only in official camp sites throughout the protected landscape region. This route can also be ridden on your mountain bike.

Sleeping

Autocamp Třeboň (☎ 384 722 586; www.autocamp-trebon.cz; tent/bungalow per person 100/165Kč; ☎ May-Sep; (P)) This pleasant site is south near the Schwarzenberg Mausoleum.

Pension Siesta (☎ 384 724 831; penzionsiesta@tiscali.cz; Hradebni 26; s/d incl breakfast 500/1000Kč) Cute turtles and a balcony make this spot on the canal a little bit unique.

Penzion Modrá Růže (☎ 384 722 167; www.modra-ruze.cz; Rožmberská 39; s/d incl breakfast 600/1200Kč) With super-helpful owners providing loads of local information, this *penzion* on a quiet lane is one of Třeboň's best.

Hotel Zlatá Hvězda (☎ 384 757 111; www.zhvezda.cz; Masarykovo náměstí 107; s/d incl breakfast 1860/2520Kč) Třeboň's smartest offering has flash rooms, a spa centre, and a bowling alley; all in a 430-year-old building.

Eating

Malá Bastá (☎ 384 722 563; Masarykovo náměstí 87; mains 80-160Kč) Carp is cooked at least 10 different ways at this main-square suntrap. Don't forget to try the 'carp chips' with a glass of local beer.

Vratislavský dům (nr Masarykovo náměstí 97 & Břežanova; pizza 100Kč) Have your pizza outside in main square splendour, or head inside to the mismatched sofas and a vaguely student ambience.

Morava (Břežanova; mains 100-180Kč) The dishes are robustly meaty at this courtyard spot just off the main square.

Bílý koníček (☎ 384 721 213; Masarykovo náměstí 97; mains 120-220Kč) Perennially popular, the 'White Pony' may just outdo Malá Bastá for the most different ways to serve the local carp.

Entertainment

Rock Club Torpedo (Zámek 110; 🎵 to midnight Mon-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat), Torpedo features bands and DJs in a sweaty chateau basement.

Kino Světozor (☎ 384 722 850; Masarykovo náměstí 103) This central cinema screens the latest movies...eventually.

Getting There & Away

Bus is best when travelling from České Budějovice (22Kč, 25 minutes, approximately every hour) and Jindřichův Hradec (32Kč, 30 minutes, nine a day). Třebon is a stop on the daily Prague-Tábor-Vienna train line. On a local train from Tábor, change at Veselí nad Lužnicí; the whole trip from Tábor takes about an hour and costs 76Kč.

ŠUMAVA

Cornfields and roads may cover much of Middle Europe, but in the Šumava (Böhmerwald in German), the dense woodland harks back to wilder times. This 125km sweep of largely unpopulated wilderness on the Austrian and German border remains one of the region's rural treasures, with pockets like the Boubín Virgin Forest still regarded as pristine.

Including some of the country's grandest peaks, the humpbacked mountains (highest summit: Plechý, 1378m) of Šumava are now home to returning populations of deer, lynx and owl. They are also the source of the mighty Vltava, the river that rolls beneath Prague's Charles bridge 250km north. Cut through with waterways and peppered with lakes and sweeping slopes, Šumava offers plenty of outdoor attractions for the active traveller.

It hasn't always been this way. Ironically, while Šumava now personifies fresh air and freedom, it was a closed border zone during

the communist era: a great slab of the Iron Curtain, interlaced with electrified barbed wire and watchtowers. The barriers are now dismantled, but for Czechs a certain intrigue remains in wandering through a former forbidden zone.

The Boubín Virgin Forest region has been a nature reserve since 1858. The 1630-sq-km Šumava Protected Landscape Region (Chráněná krajinná oblast, or CHKO) was established in 1963. In 1990 Unesco declared this a biospheric reservation. The adjacent Bavarian Forest gained this status in 1981, and together they comprise central Europe's largest forest complex. In April 1991, 685 sq km of the CHKO became the Šumava National Park (Národní park Šumava). This and the CHKO now make up the biggest, single, state-protected area in the Czech and Slovak Republics.

Most of the Šumava is now open for hiking (*turistická*) with a broad network of trails. The mountainous terrain rules out cycling on most hiking trails, though the many dirt roads are good for an adventurous and challenging ride. The 240km 'Šumavská magistrála' bicycle trail traverses the park west to east, but there are also many opportunities for shorter journeys.

Czechs and Bavarians appreciate the Šumava for skiing and ski touring, the most popular areas being Železná Ruda, Špičák and Hojsova Stráž in the west, Zadov and Churáňov in the central Šumava region, and the Lake Lipno area in the east. The weather is cooler and wetter than in the rest of South Bohemia.

Information

For information online, www.sumava.com and www.npsumava.cz are your best English-language options.

Maps

The best hiking map is Klub českých turistů's Šumava (1:50,000), which includes marked trails. SHOCart's Šumava Trojmezí velká *cycloturistická* (1:75,000) map is must for cyclists.

Getting There & Away

There are several train routes into the Šumava, such as from Plzeň and Klatovy in West Bohemia, Strakonice or České Budějovice. Another rail option is from the German side on Prague-bound trains.

Getting Around

From June to September a fleet of ecologically friendly 'Green Buses' run on four routes to link towns, villages and trailheads (see www.npsumava.cz in Czech). These services can also transport bicycles. Regular bus and train services are relatively infrequent.

NATIONAL PARK WALKS

Of the many trails we list three here, it's simple to devise your own walk with the help of the maps. A very long but interesting walk is along the length of the national park, from Nová Pec, at the northern tip of Lake Lipno, to Nýrsko, southwest of Klatovy.

The national park must be entered by the trails, with camping only at designated sites. Fires can only be lit at those camp sites. The colour-coded trails are well marked with distance and walking-time information. If you pass a trail intersection and don't see a marker within about 300m, return to the intersection and try again. Also note that some of the reserve is totally off-limits: watch for 'Vystup zakázán' (do not enter) signs.

Bear Trail

The **Bear Trail** (Medvědí stezka) passes **Bear Rock** (Medvědí kámen), where the last bear in Bohemia was killed in 1856. This is the oldest walking trail in the Šumava. It starts at the Ovesná train stop and ends at a train stop in Černý Kříž (Black Cross), 14km later. Some sections are hard, such as along the rocky formations of the Jelení vrchy and up to the 1049m summit of Perník (avoid this section in bad weather).

The trail continues past Deer Lake (Jelení jezírko), Jelení village, the Schwarzenberg Canal, Bear Rock (Medvědí kámen memorial; engraved with 'Bären Stein', and about 50m off the trail), and along Hučivý stream into Černý Kříž.

The Ovesná train stop is best reached by train from either Volary (28Kč, 25 minutes, three daily) or Horní Planá (16Kč, 15 minutes, three daily). From Černý Kříž you can return by train to Ovesná (15Kč, 15 minutes, three daily), and from there return to either Volary or Horní Planá.

Povydí Trail

One of the Šumava's best trails is along the Vydra river, especially in the area called Povydí, between Čenková Pila and Antýgl.

Vydra means 'otter', and the river got its name from the many otters that used to live in it. Today, only a few otters live high up in the mountains.

Starting at Čenková Pila, the trail goes along the Vydra to Modrava, taking you past Turnerova hut (*chata*), Antýgl, the right side of the Vchnickotetovský Canal, Rokyta and finally to Modrava. This is an easy and scenic 14km trail. It's also possible to start further down the river at Rejštejn.

Eight buses a day run from Sūsice to Čenková Pila (34Kč, 45 minutes) and four buses return from Modrava to Sūsice (48Kč, 1½ hours). Both Modrava and Čenková Pila are stops on the 'Green Bus' that runs from June to September.

Boubín Virgin Forest

The 46-hectare **Boubín Virgin Forest** (Boubínský prales), surrounds the peak of Boubín (1362m) and was one of the world's first nature reserves, founded in 1858. Beech, spruce and pine predominate and some trees are estimated to be over 400 years old. The forest itself is largely out of bounds to visitors.

If you're driving, the easiest approach is via the car park at Kaplice. From here it's an easy 2.5km to U pralesa lake, on a green and then blue trail. To reach Boubín, stay on the blue trail along the boundary of Boubínský prales. After 6km you reach Křížova Smrč, and from there it's 1.5km to the top of Boubín. Without a car you need get off at the zastávka Zátoň train stop and walk an additional 2km to the trailhead at Kaplice.

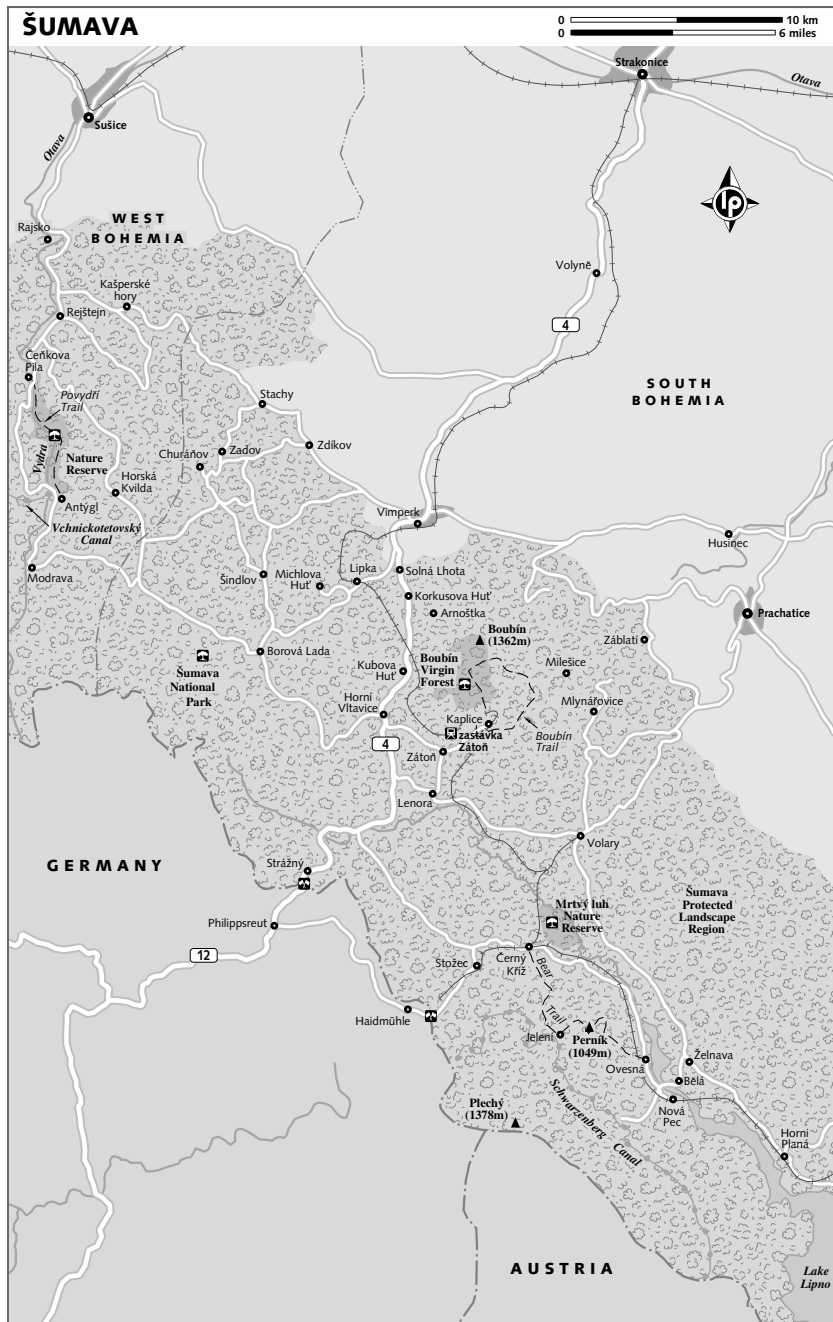
A longer (17.5km) and more enjoyable walk takes in all the above but continues on the blue trail southwest from the summit of Boubín past Johnův kámen to Kubova Huť. Give yourself at least five hours from Kaplice to Kubova Huť.

Sleeping

There is plenty of accommodation in the region, but private rooms are often the best bet – houses will often have 'Zimmer frei' signs in the window. There's little to see in the region's towns, so you won't be missing anything by staying in the wilds.

Lenora's *pensions* are hard to find from the train station (head 10 minutes downhill to the main road).

Between Lenora and Vimperk, Kubova Huť is a ski resort in winter and is literally



teeming with resorts, *pensions* and private rooms. Further to the west the settlements are smaller and more rustic.

Pension Kuboňová (☎ 728 082 132; <http://penzion.ukubonu.wz.cz>; Soumarská 408; s/d incl breakfast 400/800Kč; **P**) In Volary, Pension Kuboňová has comfy rooms in a brighter part of town. It's on the road out of Volary to Lenora.

Pension Lenora (☎ 388 438 813; s/d incl breakfast 540/900Kč) Friendly and comfortable, this is the best of them in Lenora.

Amber Hotel Kuba (☎ 388 436 319; www.legner.cz; s/d incl breakfast 950/1400Kč; **P**) This comfy three-star spot in Kubova Huť also has cheaper 'tourist' rooms with shared bathrooms (single/double 400/700Kč).

Hotel Klostermannova Chata (☎ 376 599 067; www.klostermannovachata.cz incl breakfast 1400Kč; **P**) In Modrava splurge at this stunning alpine lodge originally built by the Czechoslovak Tourist Club in 1924 and recently refurbished.

Autocamp Antýgl (☎ 376 599 331; ☒ May-Oct). This is the only option in Antýgl.

Pension Bystrina (☎ 388 599 221) This *pension* is in Čeňkova Pila, along with a basic camp site.

Pension Kizek (☎ 388 582 527; s/d incl breakfast 500/900Kč) Try this *pension* in Rejstěj.

Sport Hotel Pekárna (☎ 376 526 869; www.hotel-pekarna.de; Tě Masaryka 129; s/d incl breakfast 600/900Kč) Located in Sůsice, a pleasant gateway town.

Getting There & Away

Up to eight trains a day run between Volary and Strakonice (98Kč, two hours), stopping at Lenora and two other stations – zastávka Zátoň and Horní Vltavice, both of which are about 10km from their respective towns (Kubova Huť and Vimperk). From Volary you can get direct trains to Horní Planá (40Kč, 35 minutes) and Český Krumlov (88Kč, 1¾ hours).

On weekdays there are six runs on the very scenic, 29km Vimperk to Lenora route (40Kč, 50 minutes), via Kubova Huť and Horní Vltavice. Between Sůsice and Modrava a bus runs once or twice a day.

BORDER CROSSINGS

There are border crossings to Germany south of Vimperk. A 24-hour vehicle and pedestrian crossing at Strážný, to Philippsreuth, can be reached by local bus from Horní Vltavice. Another at Stožec, to Haidmühle, is for pedestrians and cyclists only and is open from 9am to 9pm.

ROŽMBERK NAD VLTAVOU

pop 350

Perched on the slimmest of ridges above a hairpin bend in the Vltava river, Rožmberk is one of South Bohemia's loveliest castles, and surprisingly quiet for somewhere so near tourist magnet Český Krumlov. Most visitors are thirsty canoeists who drop in for a refreshing beer on their way from Vyšší Brod, but with a couple of romantic riverside hotels with charming outdoor restaurants, it's a low-key alternative to staying in crowded Český Krumlov.

The so-called **Upper castle**, built in the mid-13th century, was destroyed by fire in 1522; the only reminder today is the crumbling **Jakobín tower** in the trees above. The 1330s **Lower castle** (☎ 380 749 838; www.hrad-rozemberk.cz; adult/concession 75/50Kč, in English 140/80Kč; ☒ 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, to 3.15pm May & Sep, 9am-3.15pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct) was rebuilt in the Renaissance style in the 1550s. It's said to be haunted by a ghost called the White Lady (Bílá paní), the long-suffering wife of one of the Rožmberks.

After the Battle of the White Mountain the castle came into the hands of the Buquoy family. All the paintings, sculpture, porcelain, furniture, weapons and some particularly nasty torture instruments are all from their era. The treat of the tour is the banquet hall, covered in 16th-century Italian frescoes. One fresco, behind a grille, is encrusted with jewels confiscated during the Thirty Years' War.

Sleeping & Eating

The village below has some private rooms (look for signs with '*privát*' or '*ubytování*') starting from 400Kč per person.

Kemp Rožmberk (☎ 380 749 816; tent 65Kč; ☒ May-Sep; **P**) North of the castle, across the river from the Český Krumlov road, this pleasant camp site has the perfect riverside setting.

Penzion Adler (☎ 380 749 844; s/d incl breakfast 380/760Kč) Tucked in a quiet lane behind the Penzion Romantik, the Adler has a sunny patio and basic but comfortable rooms. The restaurant is popular with locals.

Hotel u Martina (☎ 380 749 745; www.hotelumartina.cz; s/d 500/800Kč; **P**) Look for the white horse above the entrance of this riverside hotel right on the main square next to the Hotel Růže. In summer there are DIY barbecues on the outside terrace.

Penzion Romantik (☎ 380 749 906; www.penzionromantik.cz; s/d incl breakfast 690/1180Kč; **P**) The rooms are wonderfully clean and crisp at this

spot with river views 200m before the main square on the Český Krumlov road.

Hotel Studenec (☎ 380 749 818; www.hotel-studenec.com; s/d incl breakfast 750/1380Kč; 📍) There's stunning views and a majestic display of stags heads, but vegetarians might feel queasy at the menagerie of stuffed animals in the restaurant. Canoes and bikes can be hired.

Hotel Růže (☎ 380 749 715; www.hotelruze.rozumberk.cz; s/d incl breakfast 800/1250Kč; 📍) Nice and comfortable, the Hotel Růže has a charming outdoor terrace with old-style lamps. Romantic castle views are included at no extra cost.

There is a supermarket on the main square.

Getting There & Away

Seven buses a day come from Český Krumlov (24Kč, 35 minutes) continuing on to Vyšší Brod.

VYŠŠÍ BROD

pop 2650

Vyšší Brod is another popular riverside stop for canoeists, and plenty of Austrian tourists travel the 8km from the border to visit the Cistercian monastery. The town is an easy 24km from Český Krumlov.

Information

Infocentrum (☎ 380 746 627; náměstí 104; 🕒 9am-1pm & 1.30-5.30pm) organises accommodation, sells maps and has internet access for 1Kč per minute.

Sights

CISTERCIAN MONASTERY

This fortified **monastery** (cisterciácký klášter; ☎ 380 746 674; cist.klaster@vyshibrod.cz; adult/concession 70/50Kč, in English 130/100Kč; 🕒 9.30-11.30am & 1.15-4.15pm Tue-Sat, 1.15-4.15pm Sun Apr-Sep) was founded by Vok Rožmberk in 1259, but not completed until the late 14th century. It withstood two Hussite assaults in the 15th century. Later owners were the Egenbergs and the Schwarzenbergs. It was closed by the communists in 1950 and its monks imprisoned. After a period of neglect repairs began in 1990.

It has one of Bohemia's finest Gothic buildings, the **Chapter house** (Kapitulní síň), completed in 1285, its roof supported by a single pillar. A highlight is its 70,000-volume **library**, founded with the monastery. The large library hall is entered by a secret door through a bookcase in the small library hall. Note the gold leaf, rococo ceiling.

In the monastery grounds, there is also a **postal museum** (poštovní muzeum; adult/concession 25/10Kč; 🕒 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), for fans of the days before email.

Activities

If you're interested in paddling down the Vltava, **Inge Tour** (☎ 380 746 139; www.ingetour.cz; Miru 379) operates out of the **Inge Penzión**, right below the monastery, and hires out canoes and rafts for the one-way trip to Rožmberk and Český Krumlov. Prices average about 950Kč per day for an open canoe (two persons) and 1350Kč per day for a raft (three to four people).

Sleeping & Eating

Pod hrází (☎ 380 746 427; tent/bungalow per person 65/220Kč; 🕒 May-Sep; 📍) This camp site is between the monastery and the river.

Café/Penzión Alpská Růže (☎ 380 746 315; villa@volny.cz; náměstí 73; s/d incl breakfast 500/1000Kč) Aromas from delicious cakes waft from this arty *café/pension* dubbed the 'Rhododendron'. Don't worry if you eat too much because the rooms are very comfortable.

Inge Penzión (☎ 380 746 482; www.pensioningez.cz; Miru 379; s/d incl breakfast 620/1000Kč; 📍) On a bend in the river under the Cistercian monastery, this spot gets busy with thirsty canoeists who stop for a beer, and stay for the comfy rooms and popular restaurant. Camping is available in the garden for 100Kč per person.

Hotel Panský dům (☎ 380 746 669; www.hotelpanskydum.cz; Miru 82; s/d incl breakfast 650/1300Kč) Check out the interesting sepia photographs from the days of the Hapsburgs in the lobby, but rest assured the rooms are now smart and modern. Look for the green building just off the main square.

Getting There & Away

The town is on a rail spur on the well-served České Budějovice–Austria line. There are at least 11 trains a day from Rybník (20 minutes), and it's about 1¼ hours from there to České Budějovice (45Kč).

Frymburk-bound buses run approximately seven times a day from Český Krumlov via Rožmberk nad Vltavou to Vyšší Brod (32Kč, 50 minutes to an hour).

BORDER CROSSINGS

Two 24-hour vehicle and pedestrian crossings to Austria are near Vyšší Brod: Studánky to Weigetschlag, and Dolní Dvořiště to Wullowitz.

LAKE LIPNO

pop 5000

Visitors come from miles around to splash in Lake Lipno, but there's not much here except the Czech Republic's largest artificial body of water, and loads of summertime ice-cream stalls. Adjoining a dam 8km west of Vyšší Brod, this huge watery expanse is a worthwhile, if touristy, stop-off. Recent developments include lakeside apartments, a yacht marina and mini-golf. During summer expect to hear lots of German and Austrian accents thrilled by a good exchange rate.

Orientation

The largest town along the lake is Horní Planá, a major centre with accommodation, shops and transport. The smaller towns of Frymburk and Černá v Pošumaví can also be used as bases to explore the area.

Information

KIC Infocentrum (☎ 380 738 008; www.horniplana.cz; náměstí 8; 🕒 7.30am-6pm May-Aug, to 4pm Oct-Apr), in Horní Planá, sells hiking and cycling maps, and arranges accommodation. It also has internet access (2Kč per minute) and rents bikes.

Activities

Boats, windsurfers, kiteboards, bikes and skis (in winter) are available from rental outfits across the area. Speak to KIC Infocentrum (see above) about the best deals.

Sleeping & Eating

Along the lakefront, especially the eastern shore, there are many camp sites and *pensions*, but few hotels. Without a booking in July or August, your only hope is a camp site, most of which open from May to September. Prices plummet outside the summer season.

HORNÍ PLANÁ

There are plenty of hotels on the main square, but they are a hike from the lake itself.

Autocamping U pláže (☎ 337 738 374; www.hotel-plaz.cz; tent/bungalow per person 60/370Kč; 📍) Just minutes from the ferry terminal and the beach, the camp site at Horní Planá is conveniently located.

Hotel Na Pláži (☎ 337 738 374; www.hotel-plaz.cz; s/d incl breakfast 540/980Kč; 📍) Three hundred metres down the road is the camp site's sister hotel. It's pretty swish for the area but the rooms

are a tad clinical. More relaxed is the beach volleyball, crazy golf and pedal boats for hire on the hotel's sandy 'beach'.

ČERNÁ V POŠUMAVÍ

The lakeside here is crowded with camp sites.

Autokemping Jihočeského Autoklubu (☎ 380 744 125; tent/bungalow per person 70/200Kč; 📍) This camp site gets seriously busy, and is a lively and social place.

Hotel Swing (☎ 380 744 294; www.hotelswing.cz; s/d incl breakfast 600/1000Kč; 📍) Down on the lake gets noisy in summer and this spot is more relaxed. The architecture is a little dour, but there is a swimming pool if you're feeling too lazy to walk 250m to the lake. Hotel Swing is well signposted from the main road.

FRYMBURK

The most pleasant place to stay, Frymburk is a bustling market town with a leafy main square.

Camping Frymburk (☎ 380 735 284; www.campingfrymburk.cz; tent 90Kč; 🕒 May-Oct) North of town, this also has two-, three- and four-bed huts (500/550/600Kč).

Maxant (☎ 380 735 229; www.hotelmaxant.cz; s/d incl breakfast 1020/1630Kč; 📍) The marionettes in the lobby are a little spooky, but there's nothing else scary about this welcoming place on the main square. Relax in the comfortable rooms or in the solarium and massage area.

Hotel Vltava (☎ 380 735 418; www.hotel-vltava.com; s/d incl breakfast 1500/3000Kč; 📍) Also on the main square, this new place has lifted the game in Frymburk with classy rooms, a solarium and a heated swimming pool.

Getting There & Away

Five buses a day run from Horní Planá through Černá v Pošumaví and Frymburk to Lipno nad Vltavou (28Kč, 40 minutes). Many continue to Český Krumlov (34Kč, 1¼ hours).

Up to five trains a day travel from České Budějovice (88Kč, two hours) to Volary. From Volary, trains go to Prachatice (40Kč, 40 minutes) and beyond eight times a day.

Getting Around

Apart from local buses, regular ferries (adult/concession 10/5Kč) cross the lake from Horní Planá, Dolní Vltavice and Frymburk.

In July and August **Lipno Line** (☎ 380 736 276; www.lipno-line.com; Přístav 71) runs **sightseeing cruises**

on the lake from both Lipno nad Vltavou and Frymburk. The two-hour cruises (adult/concession 235/130Kč) depart daily at 1.30pm, and shorter 80-minute cruises (adult/concession 195/95Kč) depart daily at 9.30am, 11am and 3.30pm. From July to August a three-hour music cruise (adult/concession 420/195Kč) departs at 6pm on Fridays from Lipno nad Vltavou. Bookings are recommended.

PRACHATICE

pop 11,800

A grim arc of Stalinist concrete shoeboxes does its best to overwhelm the well-preserved and evocative centre of Prachatice, but thankfully a largely intact 14th-century defensive wall has kept ancient enemies and modern architectural contamination at bay. And when you tire of the Renaissance splendour and a cosmopolitan selection of local restaurants, there's plenty to do in the surrounding hills and woodlands of the Šumava region.

History

The town of Prachatice was founded in the 13th century as a trading post along the important Golden Trail (Zlatá stezka), bringing salt from Bavaria in return for Czech grain.

Hussites under General Jan Žižka conquered Prachatice in 1420; as a reward for its later return to the royalist fold in 1436, King Sigismund made it a royal town.

After a fire in 1507, Prachatice, by then in the hands of the Rožmberks, was rebuilt; most

of the Renaissance structures to be seen today come from that time.

Petr Vok, the last of the Rožmberks, sold it to Rudolf II in 1601, but the town sided with the Protestants during the rebellion of the Czech nobles, and in 1620 it was heavily damaged by one of Rudolf II's generals, Buquoy.

During the rule of later aristocratic families, Prachatice stagnated, though one result of the neglect was the survival of the town walls.

Orientation

The main train station is at the end of Nádražní, the continuation of Zvolenská, a 500m-walk east of the old town. The main bus station is a bit closer, on the corner of Nádražní and Nebahovská.

Part of the old town is pedestrianised – there is a car park at the northern end of Velké náměstí.

Information

Club 111 (☎ 388 315 888; Křišťanova 111; ☎ 10am-midnight) is a sports bar with internet access.

ČSOB (Nádražní 67) has an exchange desk and an ATM.

The **hospital** (nemocnice; ☎ 388 600 111; Nebahovská) is 500m east of the centre.

Infocentrum (☎ 388 312 563; www.prachatice.cz; Velké náměstí 1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 1-5pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep, limited hr out of season) can also organise accommodation.

The **post office** (cnr Pivovarská & Malé náměstí) is just north of the old town.

Sight & Activities

Coming from the bus or train station, along Zvolenská and Malé náměstí, you are faced with the 14th-century **town walls**, which were beefed up in 1620. On the left is the **chapel of St John of Nepomuk** (kaple sv Jana Nepomuckého).

Enter the old town and historic Velké náměstí through the **Lower gate** (Písecká brána). Through the gate, on the left behind the heavily decorated **Heydl house** (Heydlův dům), at No 30, is the 16th-century **Literary school** (Literátská škola), where Jan Hus is said to have studied.

In front of you is the 14th-century **St James church** (sv Jakuba kostel), with a little park behind it. The house on the south side, at No 31, bears a sgraffito depicting the Last Supper.

At Velké náměstí 41 is **Rumpál house** (Rumpálův dům), a former brewery covered with Renaissance battle scenes. Opposite are the **Old town hall** (Stará radnice; 1571) and the neo-Renaissance **New town hall** (Nová radnice; 1903), both covered in sgraffito.

The **Prachatické museum** (☎ 388 311 419; Velké náměstí 13; adult/concession 40/15Kč; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Jul-Aug, 9am-4pm Tue-Fri Apr-Jun, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Sep-Dec) was built as a palace in 1572 by the Rožmberks and still has the town's finest façade, plus a collection of weapons and old postcards.

Festivals & Events

Prachatice goes fairly wild during the mid-June **Gold Trail Festival** (Slavnosti zlaté stezky), with medieval costumes, fencing tournaments and fireworks. An annual **Folk Music Festival** is held on the last Saturday in February.

Sleeping & Eating

Infocentrum can help with private rooms (from 350Kč per person).

Ubytování (☎ 602 474 270; Starokasárenská 192; dm per person 225Kč) Here's the ideal dorm – cheap, clean and (relatively) central.

Hotel Koruna (☎ 388 310 177; www.pthotel.cz; Velké náměstí 48; s/d incl breakfast 650/950Kč) Tucked nicely down a quiet alley just off the main square, the Koruna has a striking Renaissance façade and a popular cellar restaurant. The rooms don't live up to the beautiful façade, but they are clean and comfortable.

Hotel Parkán (☎ 388 311 868; www.hotelparkan.cz; Věžní 51; s/d incl breakfast 690/990Kč; ☎ ☎) Built around Prachatice's original 14th-century

town walls, this is the flashiest place in town and has a sunny deck that looks out on the town's park.

Pizzeria Marco (☎ 388 316 950; Husova 106; mains 100-130Kč; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat, 4pm-midnight Sun) The public library is just across the road. It could also take you a while to read through the substantial menu of tasty Italian favourites.

Tandoor (☎ 388 310 618; Horní 165; mains 100-130Kč; ☎ 11.15am-3pm & 5.30-9pm Mon-Thu, to 11pm Fri-Sun) Hidden away in a town in South Bohemia is a very good North Indian restaurant. Look for the statues of Hindu gods with little flashing lights in the window.

Other recommendations:

Pension Tina (☎ 388 319 318; Pod Lázními 318; s/d 400/700Kč) Friendly and homely in a chalet style house.

Pizzeria Celtic Bar (☎ 388 310 048; Velké náměstí; mains 70-80Kč; ☎ to 5am Fri & Sat) Guinness and cheap pizza at night and gelati on the square during the day. How very Celtic.

New Peking (☎ 721 631 964; Velké náměstí 10; mains 100Kč; ☎ 10.30am-10.30pm) Is the food at the New Peking as good as old Peking? Probably not, but it's passable Chinese.

Getting There & Away

There are 12 buses a day to Prague (120Kč, 2½ hours), 15 to České Budějovice (40Kč, one hour) and departures all day to Husinec (13Kč, 10 minutes) and Vimperk (24Kč, 40 minutes).

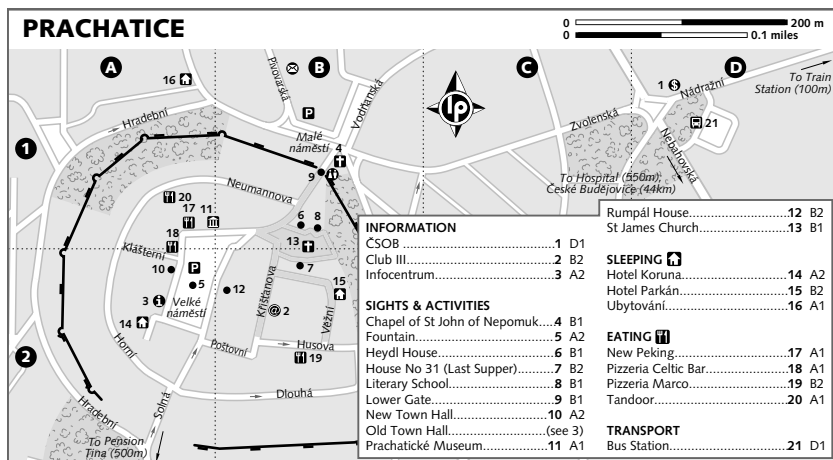
Prachatice is on a minor train line from Volary to Čenicenice (40Kč, 45 minutes, 11 trains a day), where it joins the České Budějovice-Plzeň main line.

HUSINEC

pop 1350

The small village of Husinec, 5km north of the town of Prachatice, is known for the **Jan Hus house** (Jana Husav dům), where the reformist preacher Jan Hus is said to have been born around 1371, and its small **museum** (☎ 388 331 284; adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Tue-Sun May-Sep). In early July this is the scene of a **Jan Hus commemoration**, with a remembrance ceremony, cultural events and exhibitions. The main square, Prokopovo náměstí, has a large **statue of Hus** that was erected in 1958.

Penízión u Blance (☎ 388 331 062; Komenského 38; s/d 450/800Kč) Conveniently near the bus station, this is a reasonable option for stopovers.



VIMPERK

pop 8000

This is a pleasant town with a castle majestically perched on a hill – but not much else. The **castle**, founded at the end of the 13th century but incinerated after a lightning strike in 1857, is still extremely dilapidated, but the views make a climb up the **Vlček tower** (Vlčková věž; admission 5Kč) worthwhile. There's also a small **museum** (adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ 9am–noon & 1–4pm Tue–Sun May–Oct), with some so-so glass (Vimperk is a centre for glass manufacturing) exhibits. Bohemia's first calendar was printed here in 1484, but you get the feeling that not much has happened since.

The town grew around the castle, prospering from trade along the so-called Golden trail (Zlatá stezka) between Bavaria and Bohemia. Some Gothic and Renaissance houses remain in the square, along with the Gothic **Black tower** (Černá věž). A small **museum** about the Golden trail (adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ by appointment) is in the same building as the tourist information office.

Orientation & Information

The train and bus stations are 3km from the castle and old town; turn left onto the highway and continue downhill. Buses to town are frequent in the morning, less so in the afternoon.

The **tourist information office** (městské informační středisko; ☎ 388 411 894; www.mesto.vimperk.cz; náměstí Svobody 8; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–4pm Sat & Sun May–Sep, 9am–4pm Mon–Fri Oct–Apr) is on the main square.

Sleeping & Eating

Autocamp Vodník (☎ 388 415 656; www.autokemp.vodnik.cz; Jiráskova 278; tent/bungalow 80/170Kč; ☎ Jun–Aug; P) This camp site, 2km from the train station (follow signs to Zdíknov), is the closest to the centre.

Terasa Hotel (☎ 388 411 212; www.hotelterasa.cz; Pasovská 34; s/d incl breakfast 690/1380Kč; P) Just off the main road to Strakonice, the huge rooms in this grand old dame have recently been refurbished. Friendly staff and a popular downstairs restaurant make this Vimperk's best bet.

Amber Hotel Anna (☎ 388 412 050; www.legner.cz; Kapliřova 168; s/d incl breakfast 1600/2200Kč; P) Loads of marble in the lobby but slightly impersonal staff make this spot the poshest place in town.

Restaurace Lotte (☎ 388 514 034; Rožmberská 4; mains 100–200Kč; ☎ 10am–10pm Mon–Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat, to 9pm Sun) Concealed on the first floor down a sleepy shopping arcade is this bright and buzzy spot with huge steaks and a big local following.

Getting There & Away

Buses are less frequent but faster than trains to Strakonice (30Kč, 40 minutes), Prachatic (28Kč, 35 minutes), České Budějovice (72Kč, 2¼ hours) and Prague (110Kč, three hours).

Vimperk is an hour from either end of the Strakonice–Volary train line, with eight trains a day (46Kč) through beautiful mountain and forest scenery.

ŽELEZNÁ RUDA & AROUND

The name of this popular Šumava ski resort means 'Iron Ore', which hints at its 16th-century mining origins. The main thing to do now, however, is walk.

Orientation

The train station for the village of Železná Ruda is 2km from the German border, at an elevation of about 750m.

Along the road to Nýrsko, a green-marked trail (4km in all) climbs north to Špičák, a ski area in a saddle (Špičácké sedlo) at about 1000m. About 7km beyond this, at 900m, is another village and ski area, Hojsova Stráž.

Activities

About 2.5km from the village towards the saddle is a year-round **chairlift** to a lookout tower at the summit of **Pancíř** (1214m). Alternatively, you can hike up to it from the saddle on a red-marked trail.

From Špičák you can also climb to the Šumava's two largest glacial lakes. The 18-hectare **Black lake** (Černé jezero) is 4.5km to the northwest on a yellow-marked road. Smaller **Devil's lake** (Čertovo jezero) is 2.5km southwest of the saddle, by trail only. Both lakes are on a red-marked trail that continues northwest along the border for 25km.

Sleeping

There are plain camp sites 1km northeast of Železná Ruda on the road to Čachrov; and at Brčálník, about midway between Špičácké sedlo and Hojsova Stráž.

There are plenty of hotels, although private rooms are better value (watch for signs).

Getting There & Away

Železná Ruda is easiest to reach by train from Plzeň (120Kč, 2½ hours, about 10 direct trains a day) or Klatovy (64Kč, one hour, 12 a day). About half of these continue across the border to Bayerisch Eisenstein; the border is open 24 hours.

PÍSECKO REGION

PÍSEK

pop 30,000

At the heart of Písecko, a traditional gold-panning area, Písek is named after the Czech word for the sand (*písek*) from which the gold was separated. In typical Czech style, the town's elegant old town is surrounded by an expanding ring of industry. Unlike other Bohemian towns however, sympathetic modern development is occurring side-by-side with the historic heart. Cross Bohemia's oldest bridge to the western side of the Otava river, and a funky new neighbourhood is adding a new chapter to the town's interesting history that is displayed in Písek's fine museum.

History

The town and castle, plus a church and monastery, were founded in 1243 by Přemysl Otakar II. The town prospered from its position on the Golden Trail trading route, and Charles IV established salt and grain storage houses here. Písek backed the Hussites, but was taken and virtually emptied by Hapsburg forces early in the Thirty Years' War. It was re-energised with the logging trade in the late 18th century.

The poet Frána Šrámek (1877–1952), who has inspired a number of directors to make films in the town, lived here.

Orientation

The train and bus stations are near each other, 1km south of the city centre. To get to the centre walk up Nádražní, turn right at Budovcova, left at Chelčíkeho, cross Alšovo náměstí, and take Jungmannova to the main square, Velké náměstí.

Information

Infocentrum (☎ 382 213 592; www.icpisek.cz; Heydukova 97; ☎ 9am–6pm May–Sep, 9am–5pm Mon–Fri Oct–Apr) is just off Velké náměstí. It has internet access (1Kč per minute) and in summer provides

walking tours of the town (adult/concession 100/50Kč).

KB (Velké náměstí) has an exchange and ATM.

Sights

The 13th-century castle was never rebuilt after a 1510 fire. Only the original right wing remains today, hidden inside a courtyard just off the main square. Nowadays, it houses the superb **Prácheňské historické muzeum** (☎ 382 211 111; Velké náměstí 114; adult/concession 30/10Kč; ☎ 9am–6pm Tue–Sun Mar–Sep, to 5pm Oct–Feb), with first-rate displays on the Nazi and communist eras.

Next door is the baroque **town hall**, which replaced the castle's left wing. **Putim gate** (Putimská brána) is the only section left from the castle's original fortifications.

There are some finely decorated Renaissance and baroque houses on Velké náměstí and Jungmannova. Mikuláš Aleš (see Around Blatna, p189) designed the sgraffito decoration of the **Hotel Otava**. Most enjoyable is a walk along the Otava near the stone **Kamenný bridge**, which dates from the second half of the 13th century and is the oldest in Bohemia (even predating Prague's Charles' bridge).

Across the bridge on the western side of the river is a new development including shops and apartments that locals have taken to calling it **Portyč**, a reference to its resemblance to Portici near Naples. Wishful thinking maybe, but the area comes as a pleasant (and modern) surprise when you're beginning to become blasé about the heritage glories of so many Bohemian old towns.

Festivals & Events

The Písecko region's preoccupation with gold-panning is celebrated in early August with a **panning championship** that is held anywhere between Slaník, a few kilometres east of Strakonice, and Kestřany, near Písek. In early June there is also the **Písek Historical Festival**.

Sleeping

Municipal Ubytovna (☎ 382 214 644; Dr M Horákové 1748; dm per person 150Kč; P) Just over 1km east of the main square, down Budá and left into Harantova, this hostel is cheap and clean.

Pension u Kloudů (☎ 382 210 802; Nerudova 66; s/d 500/850Kč) The downstairs bar is busy, but the rooms are quiet and comfortable.

Hotel Bílá Růže (☎ 382 214 931; www.hotelbilaruze.cz; Šrámkova 169; s/d incl breakfast 1000/1250Kč; P) Undergoing refurbishment at the time of writing, the

'White Rose' is blooming again to provide a more traditional alternative to the minimalist stylings of the newly opened Biograf.

City Hotel (☎ 382 215 634; www.cityhotel.cz; Alšovo náměstí 35; s/d incl breakfast 1000/1250Kč) With rooms even more chintzy than the Bílá Růže, the City is your best bet for a good old-fashioned night's sleep in this comfortable heritage hotel on a quiet square.

Biograf (☎ 380 425 510; www.hotelbiograf.cz; Gregorova 124; s/d incl breakfast 1100/1550Kč; 📺) Write your own life story at this flash new boutique hotel in a refurbished cinema on the edge of the old town.

Eating

Restaurace U Přemysla Otakara II (☎ 382 212 132; Velké náměstí 114; mains 80-170Kč) Sure it's a beer hall, but with less smoke, tasty Bohemian food, and a more diverse clientele, it's a cut above most others.

U Zlatého Býka (☎ 382 221 286; Kocínova 1; mains 90-220Kč) Písek's best steaks and brochettes are served up in the trendy interior, or out on the sunny terrace. Head south off Velké náměstí down Frán Štrámka.

Pizzeria San Marco (☎ 382 224 389; Velké náměstí 18; pizza 100Kč) Písek's hipper citizens crowd this popular terrace eatery for good thin-crust pizza and then linger over nice strong coffee.

Julius Meinel supermarket (cnr Velké náměstí & Jungmannova) For self-caterers.

Getting There & Away

Regular direct trains run to Plzeň (140Kč, two hours), České Budějovice (64Kč, 1¼ hours) and Tábor (76Kč, 1½ hours). Other services change at Ražice or Protivín.

Buses also run to České Budějovice (48Kč, 50 minutes), Prague (84Kč, 1½ hours) and Orlík (32Kč, 40 minutes).

STRAKONICE

pop 23,800

Filling the locals with pride is Strakonice's reputation as a centre for bagpipes (*dudy* in Czech), and the industrial town now turns out a diverse quattrò of Turkish fez hats, hand-guns, CZ Motorcycles and the aforementioned musical instruments (try combining all four in one twisted image). We're not sure which of them made General Patton base himself in the town when the US army liberated parts of Bohemia in 1945.

Orientation & Information

The train and bus stations are about 1km southeast of the city centre.

Česká spořitelna (Velké náměstí 55) changes money and has an ATM.

Ciao (☎ 383 323 400; Zámek 1; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) doubles as the tourist information office.

Sights

In the remains of the derelict **castle** (Strakonický hrad; admission free; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Jul-Aug, 8am-4pm May, Jun, Sep & Oct) is the **regional museum** (muz-eum Středního Pootaví Strakonice; adult/concession 30/20Kč; 🕒 same as castle) with exhibits on gold panning and local industry, including a collection of *dudy*. There is also a **tower** (adult/concession 10/5Kč) to climb. In the southern area of the castle is the two-aisled **St Procopius church**. The adjoining four-winged **Gothic monastery** dates from the 13th century and includes an important collection of paintings from the early 14th century.

Of Velké náměstí's sgraffitoed buildings, the finest is the former **town hall** by Mikuláš Aleš; others are the **municipal headquarters** (městský úřad) and **Investiční banka**.

Festivals & Events

In mid-August the castle hosts an **International Bagpipe Festival** (Mezinárodní dudácký festival; www.dudackyfestival.cz). The festival occurs every two years and was last held in 2006.

Sleeping & Eating

Autokemping Podskalí (☎ 383 322 024; tent/3-bed hut 70/450Kč; 🕒 Apr-Sep; 📍) This is a long walk west out of town and past the castle, along the Otava. You can also catch buses 380160 and 380130 from the station or the castle.

Hotel Bílá Růže (☎ 383 321 946; www.hotelruzest.cz; Palackého náměstí 80; d 1000Kč) There are lots of 'White Roses' (Bílá Růže), on the exterior façade and in the lobby, but they're looking a little wilted now. The rooms are plain, and this elegant building is just crying out for refurbishment. Downstairs is a passable Chinese restaurant (mains 80Kč).

Amber Hotel Bavor (☎ 383 321 300; www.legner.cz; Na Ohradě 31; s/d incl breakfast 1450/2000Kč; 📍) Located in what could be described as an ugly shoebox of a building, the Amber Hotel Bavor nonetheless has clean and modern (1980s) rooms. When we visited, a conference for vacuum cleaner salespeople was being held. Yep, it's that kind of place.

Restaurace Kalich and **U Madly** (☎ 383 321 306; Velké náměstí 80; mains 100-160Kč; 🕒 11am-midnight Mon-Thu, 11.30am-2am Fri, 2pm-2am Sat) Both spots are opposite the **municipal headquarters** (městský úřad). Kalich is a huge medieval restaurant, and U Madly a relaxed bar with a wide range of beers.

For a taste of Strakonice's own Nektar or Dudák beers head to **U zborova** (Bavorova 20).

Pekast (cnr Palackého náměstí & SV Markéty) For pastries, cakes and baguettes.

Getting There & Away

There are regular direct trains to Plzeň (98Kč, one hour), Blatná (40Kč, 44 minutes), Písek (34Kč, 33 minutes) and České Budějovice (76Kč, 50 minutes). Buses are a bit cheaper on the same routings and are the best bet for Prague (96Kč, two hours).

BLATNÁ

pop 6700

Blatná's name comes from the district's *blata* (fens) that were drained and made into ponds. If you're in the area it is worth seeing the 13th-century castle General Patton occupied in 1945. Before 1989 the town's liberation by the US Army on 5 May 1945 was not celebrated, but now locals are making up for lost time.

The **tourist information office** (informační centrum; ☎ 383 420 389; JP Koubka 4; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, 2-5pm Sun) can help with accommodation and internet access.

Sights

The 13th-century **castle** (Vodní hrad; ☎ 383 422 934; adult/concession 80/60Kč, in English 150/80Kč; 🕒 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Apr, May & Oct) was rebuilt several times before a major makeover in the mid-19th century. A 50-minute tour takes in the **Hunting room** (Lovecký sál), with furniture made from stag horns. The castle is connected by a bridge to the large **English garden** (anglický park), ideal for picnics.

The **cathedral of the Virgin** (chrám Panny Marie), across from the castle on náměstí Míru, is one of Bohemia's most valuable, late-Gothic structures.

Sleeping & Eating

The tourist information office can suggest private rooms.

Penzion Foto-Art (☎ 603 231 456; TG Masaryka 270; s/d 800/1400Kč) The super clean and comfy rooms above this camera shop are decorated with

owner Pavel's photographs. They're really rather good.

Pizzeria Casa Verde (☎ 775 168 775; náměstí míru 107; pizza 100Kč; 🕒 11am-10pm Mon-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat) It's actually in a yellow building, but we'll forgive them because the pizza is so good.

Getting There & Away

Regular buses link Blatná and Strakonice (40Kč, 45 minutes). To/from Plzeň, change at Nepomuk. There are infrequent buses to Prague (76Kč, 1½ hours).

AROUND BLATNÁ

About 11km east of Blatná is **Mirotice**, the birthplace of Mikuláš Aleš (1852-1913). Aleš was the foremost artist of Bohemia's so-called 'National Theatre generation', which focused on folk themes from Czech history. His designs decorate houses in Písek, Plzeň and Strakonice; and the house where he was born is now a small **museum** (adult/concession 25/10Kč; 🕒 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) dedicated to him. The museum is down Mikoláše Aleše, which runs from the southern corner of the main square.

The village is just west of the Písek-Březnice road, with several buses a day travelling the 20km to Písek (15Kč, 30 minutes).

ORLÍK NAD VLTAVOU

Though still one of the finest castles in the republic, Orlík has been vigorously renovated to the point of sterility; in summer it's also oppressively crowded. (The nearby Zvikov castle offers a more authentic experience; see p190.) Orlík's main asset is its setting - on a cliff-lined bay encircled by trees. The castle was once high above the Vltava, but the Orlík dam has filled the valley almost to the castle's lower walls.

The town of Orlík is 500m north of the castle.

Orlík Castle

The original, early-Gothic **castle** (☎ 382 275 101; adult/concession 70/30Kč, in English 140/70Kč; 🕒 9am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, to 5pm May & Sep, to 4pm Apr & Oct) dates from the 13th century. After fires in 1514 and 1802, it was rebuilt and extended. The last Czech owner, Křištof ze Švamberka, lost the castle after the Battle of the White Mountain, when it fell into Austrian hands; the Schwarzenbergs held it from 1719 until 1945, when it was seized by the state.

In 1992 it was returned to the Schwarzenbergs, and the one-hour castle tour is mainly about them. The highlight is a magnificently carved wooden ceiling that took four years to complete. In the thickly wooded gardens is the **Schwarzenberg mausoleum** (Švarcenberská hrobka). A number of hiking trails start from here.

From late June to August **Quarter** (☎ 382 275 333; www.lodnidopravaquarter.cz) runs five boats a day (less often in May and September), to the dam (adult/concession 100/50Kč, one hour) and Zvíkov castle (adult/concession 80/40Kč, 50 minutes). Tickets can be bought from the boats, which depart from just below the castle. The castle cash desk has timetables.

Small boats also offer short cruises of the lake.

Sleeping & Eating

Restaurace U Cvrků (☎ 382 275 124; s/d 200/400Kč) This inn in the centre of the village has robust food and basic rooms.

Restaurace U Toryka (☎ 382 275 181; mains 100-140Kč) Near the castle, this place serves the tourist crowd, so its tasty meals are a tad overpriced.

Getting There & Away

By bus from Prague you'll need to change at Písek (1½ hours, 80Kč). From Písek it's another 50 minutes to Orlík (32Kč).

ZVÍKOV CASTLE

pop 250

This small Gothic **castle** (☎ 382 285 676; adult/concession 50/30Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, to 4pm May & Sep, 9.30am-noon & 12.30-3.30pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct), built by the Přemysl princes in the 13th century, commands a better position than Orlík. The castle sits high above the lake, at the point where the Otava and Vltava rivers enter it. During the rebellion of the Czech Estates in 1618, a garrison of 140 men successfully defended the castle against 4000 Hapsburg troops. Unlike many Bohemian castles, it retains a medieval look.

A self-guided tour takes in furniture, weapons and a frescoed ballroom, plus a chapel with an altar featuring the Deposition of Christ and Veneration of the Three Kings (Oplakávání Krista a Klanění Tří králů), all in one painting.

From personal experience we do not recommend driving a Skoda Fabia across the

castle's narrow stone bridge. You'll soon discover there's nowhere to turn around on the other side.

Sleeping & Eating

Without a car, it is difficult to see both Zvíkov and Orlík castles without staying the night. At the village of Zvíkovské Podhradí, a walk of just over 1km south from Zvíkov castle, there are private rooms available.

Pivovar Zvíkov (☎ 382 285 660; www.pivovar-zvikov.cz; d with breakfast 1240Kč; ☎) On the road from the village to the castle, this new place combines tidy rooms with a micro-brewery and spacious restaurant.

Getting There & Away

Up to seven buses a day cover the 19km from Písek to Zvíkovské Podhradí (20Kč). Alternatively, it is a fine 14km walk on a marked trail beside the lake between the castles of Zvíkov and Orlík, or you can take a boat (see Orlík castle, p189). Cyclists have to use the minor road further inland.

NORTHEASTERN REGION

Infused in this quiet, predominantly rural corner of South Bohemia are some of the darkest times in European history. As the hub of the Hussite movement, led by Jan Žižka and Prokop Holý, the area was central to the Protestant sect's struggle with the Catholic authorities, which eventually escalated into the Thirty Years' War and engulfed Central Europe.

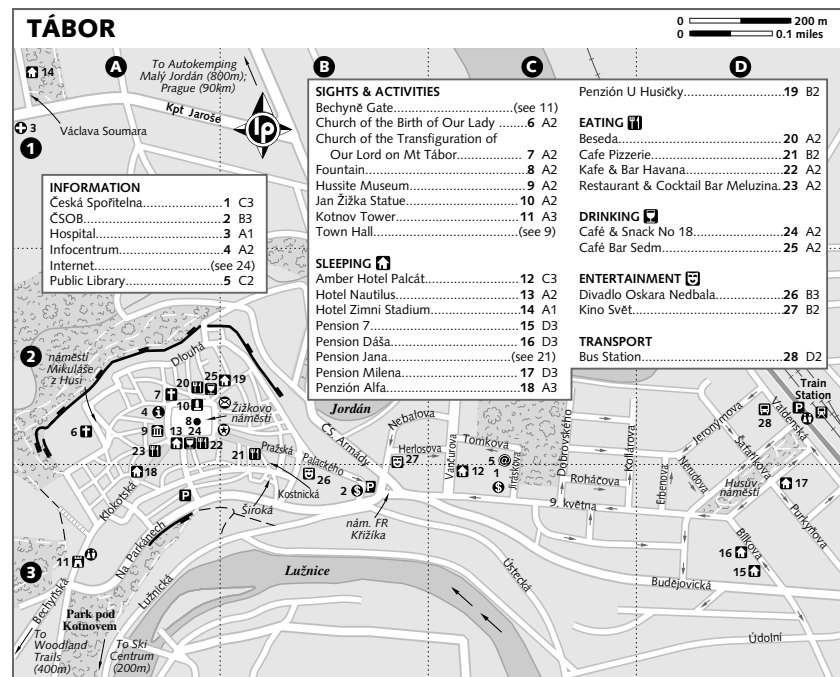
Today the languid landscape of rolling cornfields and quiet village squares conceals the ideological battles, and only the former Hussite bastion of Tábor hints at a military past punctuated by blood and religion.

The area's highlights include its spiritual heart, Tábor, the serene Renaissance perfection of Slavonice and the lakeside castle at Jindřichův Hradec.

TÁBOR

pop 36,000

Perched on a steep hillside falling to dense woodland on three sides, the natural defences of Tábor's old town are as daunting today as they were when the Hussites established their



bastion here six centuries ago. Enriched by a robust diet of ideology and warfare, the radical Protestant sect further enhanced the location's innate defensive qualities by constructing their town as a maze of narrow lanes and protruding houses.

Rather than 15th-century Catholic warriors, today it is an army of tourists challenged by the wildly winding alleys and lanes, to finally re-emerge on one of Bohemia's most beautiful and idiosyncratic town squares.

Evident all around the old town, the non-conformist streak initiated by the town's original inhabitants is maintained in a collection of funky and youthful bars, cafés and pensions.

History

Archaeological evidence suggests that Tábor was a Celt settlement in around 100 BC. A castle and town called Hradiště were established by Přemysl Otakar II in the 13th century, only to be burned down in 1277 by the Víteks. In the 14th century the lords of Sezimov z Ústí built a castle here, of which all that remains is the single Kotnov tower.

God's Warriors, the Hussites, founded Tábor proper in 1420 as a military bastion in defiance of Catholic Europe. The town was organised according to the biblical precept that 'nothing is mine and nothing is yours, because the community is owned equally by everyone'. New arrivals threw all their worldly possessions into large casks at the marketplace and joined in communal work. This extreme nonconformity helped to give the word 'Bohemian' the connotations we associate with it today. Planned as a bulwark against Catholics in České Budějovice and further south, Tábor is a warren of narrow streets with protruding houses that were intended to weaken an enemy attack. After the Taborites' defeat at the Battle of Lipany in 1434, the town's significance declined.

Orientation

The old town is 500m west from the train and bus stations, through Husův park and along 9. května. The latter runs to náměstí FR Křížka, from where Palackého and Pražská lead through the old town to Žižkovo náměstí.

Information

Česká spořitelna (trída 9. května 10) Has an exchange and ATM.

ČSOB (náměstí FR Křížka 9) Has an exchange and ATM.

Hospital (nemocnice; ☎ 381 608 111; Kpt. Jaroše) Northwest of the old town.

Infocentrum (☎ 381 486 230; www.tabor.cz; Žižkovo náměstí 2; ☎ 8.30am–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat & Sun May–Sep, 9am–4pm Mon–Fri Oct–Apr) Also books accommodation.

Post office (Žižkovo náměstí) In the pink building just off the square.

Public Library (☎ 381 252 750; Jirřkova 4; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Fri, 8am–12pm Fri) Charges 20Kč initial registration and then 15Kč per 10 minutes for internet access. The internet is also available at Cafč & Snack No 18 on the main square for 1Kč per minute.

Sights & Activities

Start on Palackého and go west past the **Oskar Nedbal theatre** (divadlo Oskara Nedbala) to the handsome main square, Žižkovo náměstí. On every side it's lined with late-Gothic, Renaissance and baroque houses; and in the middle is a **fountain** (1567) with a statue of the Hussite commander Jan Žižka, and two stone tables that the Hussites probably used for religious services.

On the square's northern side is the **church of the Transfiguration of Our Lord on Mt Tábor** (kostel Proměnění Páně na hoře Tábor), built between 1440 and 1512 and known for its vaulting and the neo-Gothic altar) its **tower** (adult/concession 20/15Kč; ☎ 10am–5pm May–Aug, Sat & Sun only Sep & Oct, weather dependent) is open for a sweeping view of Tábor.

The other imposing building on Žižkovo náměstí is the early-Renaissance **town hall** (1521), now the **Hussite museum** (Husitské muzeum; ☎ 381 252 245; adult/concession 60/30Kč; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Apr–Oct, Mon–Fri only Nov–Mar), with a copy of a peasant wagon mounted with cannons – the ingenious prototype tank invented by Jan Žižka.

Also here is the entrance to a 650m stretch of **underground passages** (podzemní chodby; adult/concession 40/20Kč; ☎ same as museum), which is open for visits only when a group of five people forms. The passages, constructed in the 15th century as refuges during fires or times of war, were also used to store food and to mature beer.

The archipelago at Žižkovo náměstí 22, beside the town hall, leads into Mariánská and then Klokotská, which runs southwest to

Bechyně gate (Bechyňská brána), now a small **historical museum** (adult/concession 40/20Kč; ☎ 8.30am–5pm May–Sep) focusing on peasant life.

Kotnov castle, founded here in the 12th century, was destroyed by fire in 1532; in the 17th century the ruins were transformed into the current brewery. The remaining 15th-century **Kotnov tower** (adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ 8.30am–5pm May–Sep) can be climbed from the Bechyně gate museum for a sweeping view of Tábor and the Lužnice river.

Tábor is surrounded by woodland and a number of marked **trails** cut into the forest of Tynska, just across the river from Bechyňská.

Ski Centrum (☎ 381 251 369; Bechyňská 398) rents rafts (450Kč per day).

Festivals & Events

Tabor Meetings, the annual Hussite Festival of Tábor is held on the second weekend in September. Expect medieval merriment with lots of food, drink and colourfully dressed locals celebrating their Hussite heritage.

Sleeping

Infocentrum can help with seasonal hostel (from 150Kč) and private room (from 250Kč) accommodation.

Autokemping Malý Jordán (☎ 381 235 103; http://web.quick.cz/atc-mj; tent/bungalow per person 60/150Kč; ☎ May–Sep; (P)) This camp site is 1km north of the town near Lake Jordán. Catch bus 20 or 21 from the main train station.

Pension Milena (☎ 381 254 755; milena.sport@volny.cz; Husův náměstí 529; s/d 300/400Kč) This welcoming hostel-style place can supply breakfast, or you can make your own mess in the 'ezy-kleen' Formica-encased shared kitchen.

Penzión Alfa (☎ 381 256 165; www.pensionalfa.de.cz; Klokotská; s/d/tr 500/800/1200Kč) This popular spot occupies a cosy corner just metres from the main square. Upstairs the rooms are snug but spacious, and downstairs you can get your Geronimo back at the funky Native American-themed cafč. If that doesn't work, try the groovily hip massage place across the lane.

Pension Jana (☎ 381 254 667; www.bedandbreakfast.euweb.cz; Kostnická 161; s/d/tr 600/1000/1250Kč; (P)) Expect a warm welcome and spacious attic rooms at the friendly spot tucked down a quiet lane.

Pension 7 (☎ 381 252 039; Bilkova 783; s/d incl breakfast 650/900Kč) Functional but friendly place with shared bathrooms.

Penzión u Husičky (☎ 381 256 419; Tržní 274; s/d incl breakfast 700/900Kč) There are inviting fragrances coming from the health food store downstairs, and the large modern rooms and giant breakfasts don't disappoint either. You'll need to get there by 5pm before the owner closes up his great smelling shop.

Pension Dáša (☎ 381 256 253; www.travelguide.cz/pensiondasa; Bilkova 735; s/d incl breakfast 700/990Kč; (P)) Work off the *pivo* in the sauna and gym at this friendly and convenient *pension*.

Hotel Nautilus (☎ 380 900 900; www.hotelnautilus.cz; Žižkovo náměstí 20; s/d 1950/2200 to 2500Kč; (P) ☎) Tábor's first and only boutique hotel is pure class from the effortlessly cool bar to the crisply minimalist rooms, and surprisingly affordable for such international ambience right on the main square.

Eating & Drinking

Kafe & Bar Havana (☎ 381 253 383; Žižkovo náměstí 17; mains 60–200Kč) Is this place Czech-Mex or Czč Guevara? Either way the combination of Czech and Mexican food and good honest cocktails makes for main square fun.

Cafč & Snack No 18 (Žižkovo náměstí 18; snacks 70Kč) Taborites drop by after work and stay for the lively atmosphere and tasty nibbles. We came for a single beer and stayed for the cocktails and weirdly familiar-sounding Czech indie pop.

Cafč Pizzerie (☎ 381 254 048; Kostnická 159; pizza 70–115Kč) Grab a spot on the tiny outside terrace and enjoy good Italian food.

Beseda (☎ 381 254 180; Žižkovo náměstí 17; mains 100–200Kč; ☎ to 3pm Sat, closed Sun) Rough and ready – and that's just the mob beside you. Beseda is popular with locals for the great value daily specials on robust Czech favourites. There's Bernard and Budvar on tap and you might even get lucky with live music at night.

Entertainment

Divadlo Oskara Nedbala (☎ 381 254 701; www.divadlo.tabor.cz in Czech; Palackého) Tábor's theatre is closed in summer, but during the rest of the year you can see everything from jazz and classical music to Czech theatre.

Kino Svět (☎ 381 252 200; náměstí FR Křížka 129) See Hollywood favourites at Tábor's cinema (80Kč), and chat about them afterwards at the cafč next door.

Getting There & Away

Bus (☎ 381 253 898) is generally the best way in and out of Tábor. Direct services include:

Prague (80Kč, 1½ hours), České Budějovice (60Kč, one hour), Jihlava (68Kč, 1½ hours) and Brno (150Kč, three hours). Most services to Plzeň are via Prague or České Budějovice, but there is one direct service a day (120Kč, 2½ hours). For Telč, you will have to change in Jihlava.

Trains (☎ 381 484 111) also make the run to Prague (144Kč, 1½ hours), but they are generally more expensive and less convenient.

AROUND TÁBOR

Chýnov Cave

At the **Chýnov Cave** (Chýnovská jeskyně; ☎ 361 809 034; adult/concession 50/25Kč; ☎ 9am–4.30pm Tue–Sun Jul–Aug, to 3.30pm May, Jun, Sep & Aug) a narrow passage descends 37m to the colourful stalagmites formed by slowly dripping, mineral-laden water. Re-opened in 2006 with dramatic new lighting, the cave is a 3km walk on a blue-marked trail northeast from the train station at Chýnov, which is four stops east of Tábor on the Pelhřimov line.

Soběslav

pop 7300

During the Hussite Wars Soběslav, 18km south of Tábor, was Oldřich Rožmberk's main defensive stronghold against the Hussite armies.

The main attractions of this small town are its two double-naved Gothic churches: **St Vitus church** (kostel sv Víta) and the **church of our Lady** (kostel Panny Marie). The latter is notable for its tower, built in 1487, and an elaborate vaulted ceiling in the crypt.

BECHYŇ

pop 5700

A quiet spa town, largely off the beaten track, Bechyně has been revitalised in recent years with the renovation of its beautiful castle. Standing over the precipice of the Smutná creek (there are vertiginous views coming into town over the bridge from Tábor), the chateau backs onto an impressive square featuring a few worthwhile sights of its own. The town is one of the oldest settlements in Bohemia with archaeological evidence of settlement 3000 years ago.

Orientation & Information

The adjacent bus and train stations are 500m southwest from the castle and the main square, náměstí TG Masaryka.

Sleeping & Eating

See the information office for a list of accommodation.

Hotel Slavie (☎ 565 321 540; www.hotelslavie.web.tiscali.cz; Masarykovo náměstí 29; s/d incl breakfast 600/800Kč; P) With comfortable rooms on the main square, a sunny downstairs restaurant serving the local Poutník beer, and a first-floor pizzeria, what more do you need?

Penzion Lucerna (☎ 565 333 333; www.penzionlucerna.cz; Solní 853; d incl breakfast 900Kč; P) Spacious rooms around a paved courtyard are Pelhřimov's best value accommodation, and there is also a good restaurant and wine bar.

Cukrarna u Radnice (Masarykovo náměstí; sandwiches 11Kč, baguettes 22Kč; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Thu, 8am-5pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) Grab a coffee and a tasty chicken schnitzel baguette and watch the world go slowly by on the main square.

Getting There & Away

Buses run reasonably frequently to Jihlava (28Kč, 40 minutes). Long-distance buses run to Prague (81Kč, two hours, up to five a day) and Brno (105Kč, two hours, up to six a day). Pelhřimov is on the Jihlava–Tábor train line, an hour from Tábor (80Kč, 10 trains a day) and 1¼ hours from Jihlava (72Kč).

JINDŘICHŮV HRADEC

pop 22,600

Back in the Middle Ages quiet Jindřichův Hradec was one of Bohemia's most important towns, with wealth drawn from its position on a trading route to Austria. Reconstruction from fires in 1435, 1773 and 1801 has created a broad collage of architecture from the 15th to the 19th centuries. At its centre is a well-preserved old town square, and a stunning lakeside chateau. If you're feeling all castled out, focus on the new National museum of Photography, or get wound up by the world's largest mechanised nativity scene.

Orientation & Information

The adjacent bus and train stations are 1km from the city centre; to reach the main square walk south down Nádražní, turn left past a church onto Klášterská and continue south down Panská to the main square, náměstí Míru.

The **tourist information office** (informační středisko; ☎ 384 363 546; www.jh.cz; Panská 136; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat & Sun Jul-Aug, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat Sep-Jun) also arranges accommodation.

MyFun NetK@fé (☎ 607 845 155; náměstí Míru) at the southwest end of the main square has internet access for 1Kč per minute. There is a wi-fi hotspot at the **Hotel Concertina**.

ČSOB (náměstí Míru) has exchange and ATM facilities.

Sights

CHATEAU

Jindřichův Hradec is the Czech Republic's third-largest **chateau** (☎ 331 321 279; zamek@jindrichuvhradec.elsynet.cz; ☎ 9am-4.15pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 10am-noon & 1-4.15pm May & Sep, 10am-3.15pm Apr & Oct), covering 3.5 hectares and boasting a hotchpotch of treasures. A lavish 16th-century monument to the Renaissance, at first glance, the chateau is in fact a medley of architectural styles, spanning the ages from its foundation at the hands of Jindřich Vitek in the early 13th century, right through to the present day.

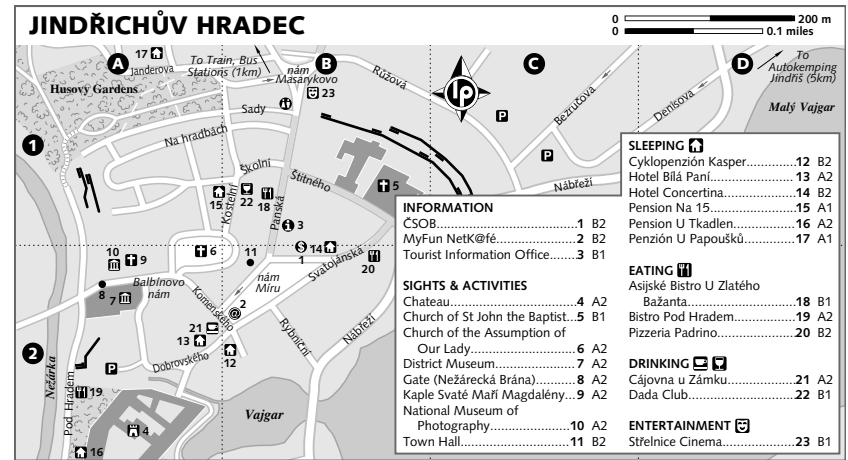
The jewel of the Renaissance chateau is the **Rondel**, an unusual Italianate garden pavilion decorated with gilded stucco and colourful frescoes, designed in 1591 by Baldassare Maggi. The highlight of the older, Gothic part of the castle is the **Ceremonial hall**, where original, 14th-century frescoes illustrate scenes from the life of St George.

There are three **routes** (one route adult/concession 65/35Kč, in a foreign language 140/70Kč, all three routes 170/80Kč, in a foreign language 400/180Kč) through the castle. **Route A** takes in Adam's Building, the Renaissance interiors, Napoleon's bed from Vienna and the piano played by Mozart; **Route B** covers the medieval, Gothic interiors; and **Route C** explores the 18th- and 19th-century interiors as well as the Rondel.

AROUND THE OLD TOWN

Sections of the old **town walls** still remain. To the west is the gate, **Nežárcká brána** (1466). The main square (náměstí Míru) has several late-Gothic, Renaissance and baroque houses, the most notable being the sgraffitoed **Langrův dům** (náměstí Míru 139) and its vaulted archway.

The **church of the Assumption of Our Lady** (kostel Nanebevzetí Panny Marie), behind the **town hall**, has a good cycle of 17th-century frescoes and photogenic views from its **tower** (adult/concession 10/5Kč; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-4pm). The **church of St John the Baptist** (kostel sv Jana Křtitele; admission 10Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 12.30-4.30pm Jun-Aug) is the oldest church in town and is noteworthy for some 600-year-old frescoes, including one of St Louis of Toulouse.



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Recently opened in the sgraffito and frescoed splendour of the Jesuit college is the **National museum of Photography** (☎ 384 362 459; Kostelní 20/1; www.nmf.cz in Czech; adult/concession 60/30Kč; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). The permanent and temporary exhibitions focus mainly on Czech photographers, but even if you're not a shutterbug junkie it's worth visiting to appreciate the sympathetic restoration the building has undergone.

DISTRICT MUSEUM

The Jesuit seminary opposite the Jesuit college houses the **District museum** (muzeum Jindřichohradecká; ☎ 384 363 660; adult/concession 40/20Kč; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 12.30-5pm Jun-Sep, Tue-Sun Apr, May & Oct). The foremost attraction is an extraordinary, **mechanical Nativity scene** completed by one Tomáš Krýza in 1756, after 60 years of labour. The scene comprises over 1000 handcrafted figurines and fills an entire room.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Autokemping Jindřiš (☎ 384 326 758; www.cbox.cz/behoun; Jindřiš 15; tent 60Kč) In the village of Jindřiš, this is 5km east from town on a narrow gauge train from the main station.

Penzióň U tkadlen (☎ 384 321 348; www.utkadlen.wz.cz; Pod hradem 7/IV; per person 300Kč) Restful, rustic and right on the canal, this traditional *penzion* has two and three-bed rooms and also offers discounts to members of Hostelling International.

MIDRANGE

The tourist information office books private rooms for about 230Kč per person.

Cyklopenzióň Kasper (☎ 384 361 474; www.cyklopenzion.cz; náměstí Míru; s/d 630/1260Kč) Cycle (or walk) on in to this comfortable and cosy spot just off the main square. Just mind the particularly robust cobblestones, OK?

Penzion Na 15 (☎ 384 363 021; www.15polednik.cz; Kostelní 76; s/d incl breakfast 700/1250Kč; P) Antique wrought-iron furniture and terracotta tiles provide a relaxing heritage ambience. Downstairs there's a cosy vaulted restaurant and a café looking out onto a quiet square.

Hotel Bílá paní (☎ 384 363 329; www.hotelbilapani.cz; Dobrovského 5; s/d incl breakfast 700/1150Kč) There are frescoes and creeping ivy outside, and the comfy-as interior is retro-furnished like your grandparents' house. And yes, that's a good thing.

Penzióň u Papoušků (☎ 384 362 235; papousek@esnet.cz; Na Příkopě 188/11; d incl breakfast 1000Kč). Daubed in a startling shade of duck-egg blue, this quiet place has nicely furnished rooms, some with exposed beams, and an Italo-Czech eatery downstairs. However we're not sure what 'Mould Steak' is.

TOP END

Hotel Concertina (☎ 384 362 320; www.concertina.cz; náměstí Míru 141/1; s/d incl breakfast 1480/2180Kč; P) With loads of different national flags outside, they're obviously very welcoming. This four-star chain hotel is the snazziest in town, and even offers wi-fi for the laptop traveller.

