



Prague at Christmas

Music, art and architecture in the heart of Europe

21–28 December 2026 (MM 244)

8 days

Speaker: Martina Hinks-Edwards

Hidden gems and exclusive private visits, as well as the main sites, in this endlessly fascinating city.

Top category tickets to three performances.

An excursion to Kutná Hora, a charming town renowned for its late-Gothic cathedral, now a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Visit Nelahozeves, a historic village on the Vltava, including Antonín Dvořák's birthplace and the Lobkowicz family's 16th-century estate.

The most beautiful city in Central Europe, Prague enjoys an unequalled density of great architecture, from Romanesque to modern, but it is the fabric of the city as a whole as much as the individual masterpieces that makes it so special. The city is splendidly sited on a crescent of hills rising from one side of a majestic bend in the River Vltava and across the gently inclined terrain on the other bank. A carapace of red roofs, green domes and gilded spires rise above marvellously unspoiled streets and alleys and magically picturesque squares.

The 14th century was a high point in Prague's history, when kings of Bohemia were also Holy Roman Emperors, and the city became one of the largest in the western world. The cathedral rising from within the precincts of the hilltop castle complex is one of the many monuments of that golden age. The pattern of innovation and excellence continued; some of the finest Renaissance and Baroque buildings north of the Alps are located here.

The spirit of national revival and the achievement of independence (in 1918) inspired a ferment of creativity among artists, writers and composers. A variety of styles drew on earlier Bohemian traditions, Art Nouveau was pushed in innovative directions and the dawn of modernism is manifest in some beautiful, precocious and unique architecture.

It's not all buildings: the beautifully converted Convent of St Agnes displays one of the world's best collections of medieval panel paintings, there is Mucha stained glass in the cathedral, and the incomparable Art Nouveau decoration in the Municipal House. In the city of Smetana and Dvořák, where Mozart had his most enthusiastic audiences, there is a range of historic opera houses and concert halls.



Prague, Týn Church.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly mid-morning from London Heathrow to Prague (British Airways). After settling into the hotel, there is a welcome drink and dinner.

Day 2. Morning exploration of the ancient core of the city (*Staré Město*) on the right bank of the Vltava. A dense maze of picturesque streets and alleys converges on Old Town Square, surely the prettiest urban space in Europe, with shimmeringly beautiful façades – medieval, Renaissance, Baroque and Art Nouveau. Visit the Church of St. James, a Gothic shell encrusted with Baroque finery, and the Gothic Týn Church, which lies at the heart of both Prague and Czech history. In the afternoon see one of the world's greatest collections of medieval painting brilliantly installed in the 13th-century Convent of St. Agnes. Special private visit to the glorious suite of assembly rooms created 1904–12 in the Obecní dům ('Municipal House'), a unique and very Czech *mélange* of murals and ornament. Early evening stage performance in the Smetana

Hall of the Obecní dům: Czech Christmas Mass (Jan Jakub Ryba, 1765–1815) performed by the Prague Symphony Orchestra; dinner follows the performance.

Day 3. Drive to Prague Castle, an extensive hilltop citadel, residence of dukes and kings of Bohemia from the 10th century and now of the President. The Old Royal Palace rises from Romanesque through Gothic to Renaissance, the chief glory being the Vladislav Hall with its extraordinary late-Gothic vaulting. The Cathedral of St. Vitus is a pioneering monument of High Gothic, richly embellished with sculpture, paintwork and stained glass. Afternoon visit of the private exhibition at the Lobkowicz Palace which contains a fascinating collection of paintings, decorative art and rare music manuscripts.

Day 4. The history of the Jewish community is an indelibly fascinating aspect of Prague's history. In the former ghetto, the Josefov, there remain six synagogues, town hall and cemetery. Continue to the 'New Town' (*Nové Město*, 1348), in and around Wenceslas Square, threading through a succession of arcades,

Prague at Christmas continued

and see the outstanding turn-of-the-century architecture and early modernist masterpieces.

Day 5, Christmas Day. Morning walk across 14th-century Charles Bridge, the greatest surviving such medieval structure. In the 'Lesser Town' (*Malá Strana*) visit the magnificent church of St Nicholas, one of the finest Baroque churches of Central Europe. Alternatively opt for a free morning and attend a church service before Christmas lunch. *Early evening opera at the State Opera: La Bohème* (Puccini).

Day 6: Kutná Hora. Excursion into the Bohemian countryside. In the Middle Ages, Kutná Hora acquired great wealth from the nearby silver mines. Now a small provincial town of great charm, it possesses the stunning late-Gothic St. Barbara's Church, the creation of Bohemia's finest medieval architects, whose work we also see in Prague. After lunch visit the former Cistercian cathedral of Our Lady of Sedlec in the suburbs of Kutná Hora which was ingeniously rebuilt by Jan Santini Aichel in the early 18th century. It is a work of exceptional aesthetic value harmoniously linking Gothic and Baroque architecture.

Day 7: Nelahozeves. Morning excursion to the village of Nelahozeves, Dvořák's birthplace, where there is a small museum dedicated to the composer. Visit also the magnificent house of the mid-16th century, externally retaining the aspect of a fortress but internally embodying Italianate Renaissance elegance. Restituted to the Lobkowicz family, the furnishings and works of art are excellent. *Evening opera at the National Theatre: Rusalka* (Dvořák).

Day 8. Strahov Monastery has commanding views over Prague and two magnificent library halls, which we see by special arrangement. Then walk down the hill, passing the formidable bulk of the Černín Palace and the delightful façade of the Loreto Church. Fly from Prague, arriving at London Heathrow in the afternoon.

A number of the visits are by special arrangement. It is possible the order of visits may vary from the description above.

Lecturer

Martina Hinks-Edwards. Specialist guide

living in Prague. She studied English at Charles University, Prague. She began working for MRT while still studying, firstly as an interpreter for groups visiting the Czech Republic, and from 2004 as a tour leader with a wide breadth of knowledge of the country's cultural history. She has led tours throughout the Czech Republic and has a particular interest in 20th-century Czech history and architecture. The countless accolades she has received over the years from her clients, is a reflection of her energy and enthusiasm for the job.

Practicalities

Included: private coach for airport transfers and excursions; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 4 dinners (one is light) and 3 lunches with wine, water, coffee; admissions to museums; tips for restaurant staff, drivers and guides; state and airport taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Music: tickets (top category) to 3 musical performances are included. Tickets are not confirmed until July.

Accommodation. **Hotel Maximilian, Prague** (maximilianhotel.com): A small, recently renovated 4-star hotel with a restaurant in a quiet yet central location near St Agnes convent. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is quite a lot of walking, much of it on roughly paved streets, some on inclines. The tour would not be suitable for anyone with difficulties with everyday walking and stair-climbing.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.